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# ERNEST HAYCOX

## SADDLE AND RIDE

Two men who shared a  
violent hatred—with only  
one way to settle it



## **IT WAS ONLY A MATTER OF TIME**

Clay had seen it coming, the bitter antagonism that had been building for fifteen years. Morgan had come a long way, a big man now with plenty of hired guns to back him up. But their hatred was a very private hate. They had to settle it alone. The whole town stood by—and waited.

### **ERNEST HAYCOX,**

one of the great Western writers of all time, is the author of over forty novels of the West. More than three million copies of his magnificent Western novels have appeared in Dell Editions alone.

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"Morgan," he shouted, "I'm going to drive you out."

"Ben," said Morgan, "I guess I'd better leave my mark on you like I did once before."

It was acid dropping on an old sore. Ben squirmed at the memory; his eyes yellowed-up and lost reason. His hand brushed the top of his gun—but Morgan knew he wouldn't draw. It wouldn't be that quick and final. It would be as it had been long ago, a long, drawn-out torture . . .

**SADDLE  
AND RIDE**

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**ERNEST HAYCOX**

**A D E L L W E S T E R N**



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## 1 THE JURY RETURNS A VERDICT

From the high edge of Mogul to the floor of Powder Desert was a sheer drop of fourteen hundred and sixty feet; and even on the quietest day a stream of warm air from the desert boiled up the face of the rim, so that if a man stood at the break-off and tossed his hat outward it invariably sailed back to him. Clay Morgan had shown this to his daughter Janet long ago. It was a part of their ritual on the trip to town, and as soon as they reached the rim this afternoon, she reminded him of it again; whereupon he sailed his hat across the rim, caught it on the rebound, and witnessed her delighted smile. Afterwards they turned downgrade on a steep road narrowly cut against the face of the mountain.

As they descended she began to recite lines of "Hiawatha," in preparation for a school play. Riding slightly back of her, Clay Morgan watched her small arms gesture and her naturally sober face lighten and grow faintly dramatic. To him it was a matter of never-ending astonishment that one nine-year-old girl's head could hold so much. Now and then when she forgot a line she would turn quite still, her lips pressed straight while she tried to remember. Usually she remembered, but sometimes she had to reach for the small book in the pocket of her overalls. At those times she would say in a disgusted voice, "Oh, fuzz," and give him a small sweet smile. "It's a kind of a long old poem, Daddy. I think people in those days talked too much."

She wasn't much for talking. Silence was a habit she had acquired from him, and from being so much alone on the ranch. There were no other children within ten miles of the Long Seven gate. All her games were played alone, made up from her own imaginative head. Sometimes, watching her from afar, he had seen her people the ranch yard with fictitious characters and act out their parts one by one in pantomime. She rode loose and straight in the deep saddle, unconscious of the horse yet balanced to anticipate any sudden swing. Since her first talking days he had taught her this—that trouble was something for which she must always be pre-

pared. She wore a boy's shirt and a pair of tan overalls tucked into small boots; she had black hair braided between her shoulders and gray eyes shining from a tanned face which even now foreshadowed some of her mother's lively, graphic prettiness.

The silence and the slow way she had of judging people came from him. The vivid imagination and the growing beauty came from her mother. It was something Clay Morgan had watched for, through the years—and yet, much as he had expected it, it still was strange to see in this girl the image of a woman nine years dead, to know that the tempestuous Lila who had been his wife now reached out of the grave to remind him of the one brief and violent and miserable and beautiful year of their marriage. In the beginning she had said she loved him; she had died hating him.

Powder Desert began at the bottom of the grade. Sand and sagebrush hummocks, built by the east wind, lay before them; around these lumpy barriers, high as a man's shoulders, meandered the deep twin ruts of the road. This September day's sun was half-down in the west and heat lay heavy on the flat; and in the near distance, on the benchland at the head of the desert, the houses of War Pass made an irregular outline. Toward this cattle town they traveled, Janet dreaming her nine-year-old dreams in sober stillness, Clay Morgan holding his clear intimations of trouble ahead.

War Pass lay on the first rise of the Cache Mountains, facing eastward toward the spectacular desert sunrise. Behind the town, westward, the hills rose away in irregular steps and broken contours to pine-timbered passes in the distance. On north and south, rocky defiles connected with little isolated valleys. All highways led to this crossroad town. Into it came the ranchers and cattle hands and homesteaders and the shadowy drifters of the land, seeking supplies and cheerfulness after the long loneliness of the deep hills and the dun-gray desert.

Turning at the corner of Gentry's corral, Clay Morgan faced the length of Main Street, with its double row of angular wooden buildings and its deep golden dust. Under the courthouse locusts at the corner of Main and Stage, a large group of men idly waited; and he knew then that the trial

of the rustler, Ollie Jacks, was still unfinished.

He dismounted by the stable and permitted both horses to nose into the water trough before tying them to the rack. Janet said: "I am going to Ann McGarrah's, Daddy."

She always had a quick smile for him when she mentioned Ann McGarrah's name, as though there might be some secret involved. "I think," she added, "we will eat supper there"—and watched him a moment with her observant eyes.

"You seem pretty sure of that."

Janet said, with complete conviction, "She always invites us to supper," and walked on beneath the street's board awnings. Morgan's glance followed her small, resolute figure and he smiled at the precise way she bowed toward Jesse Rusey, the town marshal, when she passed him. At the door of McGarrah's store she turned, waved at Morgan, and passed inside.

Morgan remained near the stable's hitching-rack to roll up a quick smoke. But he was never a man to let his eyes be idle; thus now, while his fingers tapered off the cigarette his glance ran down the street, past the courthouse and post office and the Long Grade saloon, past the Mountain House hotel and beyond that to the little cluster of brick and dove buildings of Old Town. Two cross-streets dropped from a higher level of the hillside. Up there sat the high, square, iron-ornamented houses owned by the wealthier merchants and the big cattlemen who liked to winter their families in town. This was four o'clock and already the street was in shadow, though the far desert burned up its brown-gray glitter. The smell of dust, the rank odor of Gentry's corral, and the faint steaming of the water in the trough rose strongly around him.

All these things he saw carefully and completely, as though the changing shadows and the shift of men and the opening and closing of doors mattered greatly. At twenty-nine his life had made him, among other things, close-mouthed and vigilant. He was a long-legged man, turned dark by the sun and toughened by constant work, with features so solidly composed that when he smiled the change of expression was a complete and surprising break. Most of the men on this street were his deep friends; but some were not—and it was this



tangled warp and woof of friendship and enmity in a tough, quick-tempered land which put the expression of aloof interest in his stone-gray eyes.

Jesse Rusey, the town's marshal, cruised the walk—short, broad body swinging a little. He had the shoulders of a wrestler; above the sweep of his mustaches was a glance as cool as flint. This man had a kind of rocky solidness, a formidable courtesy. He said, "How are you, Clay?" and passed by.

Charley Hillhouse and Hack Breathitt broke from the courthouse group and walked toward him, their boots puffing up the street's dust; but for a moment he remained slackly by the hitching-rack, his mind picking away at the mystery of Jesse Rusey. This town marshal had been in War Pass for twenty years, yet nobody knew him, or knew what he thought, or knew where his sympathies actually lay. Everything that Jesse Rusey was lay inside a cropped, ball-round head. His eyes met every man's glance with a straight gray stare. His voice was soft, in peace or in trouble.

Hillhouse and Breathitt came cheerfully forward and for a moment these three fast friends stood by the hitching-rack and swapped gossip, pleased to be together again. All of them had grown up in the country, they had gone to school together and had worked and hunted and had their fun together, and in trouble had stood inseparably side by side. Clay Morgan said: "Nothing new on Ollie Jacks yet?"

Hillhouse shrugged his shoulders. "They been arguing about it since noon. I don't see nothin' to argue about. We caught Ollie dead in his tracks, bendin' over a Three Pines calf with his iron. But there's a couple townsmen on the jury. They're the ones hanging this thing up."

Hack Breathitt grinned. "Ben Herendeen's sore enough to shoot the jury." He gave Charley Hillhouse a slanting, skeptical glance. "Your boss is gettin' pretty large for his pants, Charley. But then he always was that way."

Ben Herendeen owned Three Pines, and Charley Hillhouse was Herendeen's foreman, loyal to the core. Hillhouse said in a mild voice: "If they don't throw Ollie Jacks in the cooler there ain't no use for any juries in this country. After all, Hack, it was Ben's beef."

"Tough on Ben," said Hack, but his smile remained and

the other two knew how he felt toward Ben Herendeen. Hack Breathitt was small, quick and restless. He couldn't stand still. He was forever shifting in his tracks, his eyes and his interest always roamed around. There was a good deal of rebellion in him and a good deal of laughter. He never stayed long in one place; the mark of his campfires lay all through the hills and deep in the desert. They made an aimless, criss-cross trail which led nowhere. This was Hack Breathitt.

Clay said: "You look thin, Charley."

"I been on the go," said Hillhouse. "We're shippin' heavy this fall."

Hack Breathitt spoke impatiently. "What are we standin' here for? Let's get a drink."

They moved toward the Long Grade saloon, three abreast. Clay Morgan walked between his partners, a hand lying on each man's shoulders. He was a head taller than Hack, half a head taller than Charley. Directly opposite, under the locust trees, Clay noticed the crowd grouped around Ben Herendeen—Gurd Grant and Lige White, both big cattlemen, and Sheriff Ed Nickum, and a few smaller ranchers like Hamp Brigham and Vance Ketchell. Herendeen's riders, with a few townsmen, made up the rest of the crowd. Ben Herendeen had his huge muscular back shoved against the bole of a locust tree. He was speaking with a good deal of energy; his sandy head bobbed up and down and his extremely heavy arms made quick cuts through the air, throwing some of his physical intolerance into the talk. His eyes lifted and found Clay Morgan and for a moment, even as he spoke, his long full stare clung to Morgan. A moment later the three partners shouldered into the Long Grade.

Hack Breathitt got a bottle, two glasses, and a bunch of cigars. They went to a corner table and sat down. Hack Breathitt passed the cigars to Morgan, poured a drink for Hillhouse and for himself and settled deep in the chair. For that little interval he was as relaxed as he could ever be, still smiling a little, the sparkle of secret amusement in his eyes. He said, "To law and order," and downed the drink.

"You," said Hillhouse, "are an ornery son-of-a-gun."

"I guess," murmured Hack Breathitt, "I never see things like other people see 'em. Seems like I was born to argue."

I'm the man that puts salt in my coffee instead of sugar. Maybe I ought to settle down. You think so, Clay?"

Clay Morgan fired up one of the cigars. He was low in the chair, chin against his breast; his face then was dark and speculative. He shook his head. "Man has to make his own life, Hack. If you like yours, why change?"

Breathitt shrugged his shoulders. "Maybe I better change before it is too late."

Charley Hillhouse's question held a degree of sharpness. "What's that mean?"

"The country ain't the same," murmured Hack. "There's one hell of a beautiful ruckus comin'. The sheep and the goats. That's it. The sheep and the goats. Accordin' to Ben Herendeen I'm one of the goats. Ben's about ready to work on the goats."

Charley Hillhouse, who was a quiet workhorse of a man, slowly nodded. A young rider, wearing boots so high-heeled that he seemed to walk on stilts, entered the saloon and came straight toward the table.

"The jury's comin' in, Charley, and Herendeen wants you."

Both Morgan and Breathitt watched Hillhouse, who showed a rare irritation. He said briefly, "I'll come when I'm through here," and when the messenger tarried he added: "Go on, Billy, go on," and watched the young man leave.

"Well," said Breathitt in a more earnest manner, "we sure have had some fun, us. I guess my trouble is in thinkin' that sort of thing goes on forever. Which it don't. Here's Charley with a fine job. Here's you makin' a big ranch for yourself. And here's me—still warmin' my fingers over the campfire. Everything changes. Some men grow up and some don't. I never will."

Neither of the other men answered. Hack gently circled his glass along the table. "Charley, you remember how Clay used to laugh? I ain't seen him laugh like that in years." And both men were watching Clay Morgan with a close, analyzing regard. "You ought to get married again," said Breathitt very bluntly.

"That's right," agreed Charley.

"Very odd advice from a couple of bachelors," pointed out Morgan.

"Ain't the same," countered Hillhouse. "Ain't the same at all. Hack and me can go it single, no harm done. You never was that way. You feed on a different grass than we do."

Hack Breathitt said, as though it were an idle idea, "Catherine Grant was in town this mornin'." It was so heavy-footed that suddenly all three men were amused. Clay Morgan bent back in his chair and let out a long deep laugh. "You're a butter-fingered scoundrel, Hack."

Breathitt started to speak but was stopped by quick-rising talk on the street. A man struck the swinging doors of the saloon with both fists and rushed in. He said, in a half shout, "They let Ollie Jacks free," and ran out. The conversation in the saloon rose at once to a noisy pitch.

Charley Hillhouse slapped the palm of his hand on the table. He was violently and openly angry, a rare thing for him. "The two townsmen on that jury did it," he said. "It is plain that we can't convict a rustler in War Pass. There won't be any more monkey business with juries."

Hack Breathitt grinned. "I'd like to see Ben Herendeen's face right now."

Charley Hillhouse answered irritably. "If it was your beef, Hack, you wouldn't make a joke of it."

"No," said Hack Breathitt, "I guess I wouldn't. I guess if it was my beef I'd handle that business myself."

"We'll do that," stated Charley Hillhouse. "Wait and see."

"I'm waitin'—and I'm seein'," murmured Hack, quite seriously. He put his elbows on the table, a handsome young man, a man impatient and unconforming and disbelieving. "And this is what I'm seein', Charley. Ben Herendeen and Gurd Grant and Lige White will get tough. They'll figure to clear up the hills, their own way. You know how that ends, Charley? The sheep and the goats. Everybody on their side is sheep. Everybody else is goats. No questions and no answers. Just *bang!*" He stretched his long finger outward and cocked his thumb, making an imaginary shot. "They'll figure to scare hell out of every stray rider. But they won't, my boy. They'll just make fellows like me damned good and mad—and then the trouble starts."

"If it was your beef you'd see it our way," repeated Charley Hillhouse.

Hack Breathitt had his moments of wisdom; he had his far thoughts. "There's two kinds of people in this world, Charley. Those that have got beef—and those that have got none. People that stick and people that drift. The Lord made you and me different. It ain't my fault and it ain't your fault. But I like my way—and no man can make me change."

"Ben's got nothing against you," said Charley Hillhouse.

Hack Breathitt showed Hillhouse a smart, dark expression. "When folks get heated up, Charley, there ain't no halfway. It's one thing or the other. The sheep or the goats." He poured himself a second drink. "You know what I'm thinkin', boys? I'm thinkin' that this is probably the last time us three will sit at the same table."

"Don't talk like that," said Charley Hillhouse.

But both of them were watching Clay Morgan, who sat silent all this while, buried in his own thinking. He had always been the silent one, the last one to speak. He said, very quiet with his words, "I want you to know this, Hack. If you ever get in trouble, come to me. I'll stand behind you."

Charley Hillhouse shook his head, bothered by Morgan's words. "I knew you'd say that, Clay, but I wish you hadn't. Makes it tough on me. Long as I work for Three Pines, I'll let nothing get between me and the ranch. Nothing *at all*." He met Hack Breathitt's glance and quietly added: "Don't come to me, Hack."

"See?" murmured Hack, and then was smiling at them with a little regret and a little of his old malice showing. "Well, we've had fun."

That was all. These three rose and crossed the room, pushing through the doors. Ben Herendeen remained under the locust trees, with Lige White and Gurd Grant and a group of Three Pines riders. Sheriff Nickum was also there, coat hung loosely to his gaunt frame. Jesse Rusey, farther down the street, watched this crowd; and on him Clay Morgan put his glance for a moment. Charley Hillhouse went across the dust to join Herendeen. Janet turned out of McGarrah's store, advancing toward Morgan. Her little shoulders showed straight in the sunless light, her small feet made a quick tapping on the sidewalk boards. She said:—

"We are having supper with Ann McGarrah, Daddy." Her



soft smile held its secret again, her eyes showed it. "Didn't I tell you?"

Hack Breathitt removed his hat. "How, honey?"

"How, Hack."

Hack said: "Come along with a gentleman."

Janet put her hand in Hack Breathitt's fist and walked away with him. Hack Breathitt pushed his hat far back on his head and began speaking confidentially of a sidehill gouger he had recently seen.

"Did he have a kink in his tail?" asked Janet, who liked to be fooled.

Morgan laid his shoulders against the wall of the saloon and freshened his cigar with a match. The group remained beneath the locust trees, Herendeen and Lige White now talking together while the rest remained silent. A good many people had come to the street, scattered under the board awnings. All of them, he noticed, were watching the courthouse. Tension crawled up the street, strong enough to touch Morgan's nerves. Jesse Rusey never moved from his position as he, too, watched the courthouse door. A stage stood by the Mountain House hotel, ready to go. At the stable, Parr Gentry sat on a capsized barrel, lumped over and apparently disinterested, but Morgan saw the way the man's eyes traveled around. Hack Breathitt and Janet were crossing the dust to Tanner's drugstore and at this moment Ollie Jacks, freed by the jury's verdict, stepped from the courthouse, looked to either end of the street, and halted.

There had been some talk along the street. It died out as quickly as if a gust of wind, rushing between these buildings, drew all sound away. A pair of men walked from the saloon and stood near Morgan, one of them whispering, "Watch this, Bill." Herendeen swung his big body from the locust tree. The crowd around him shifted, each man wheeling on his heels, until everybody faced Ollie Jacks. Suddenly, for some reason of his own, Jesse Rusey left his position at the mouth of Stage Street, passed Herendeen's group and stopped at the edge of the post office, not far from Ollie Jacks.

This shifting and turning was what Clay Morgan saw, this and the taut shape of Ollie Jacks before the courthouse. He was a wiry man with the drawn, blank face of a gambler;

he was a man who had been caught stealing beef and now, by the act of the jury, was free to ride out. His horse was in Gentry's stable, fifty feet from where he stood, yet this was as far as he got, this rooted position before the courthouse with Jesse Rusey on one side of him and Herendeen's group watching him from the other, and with all the town looking on. At that moment he knew what Clay Morgan and every soul in town knew: he knew he was a dead man.

## 2 THE THIN CHANCE

This was the way Ollie Jacks faced the town, narrow-shaped and thoroughly still, his glance taking in all that was to be seen. He showed no expression during that small interval, nothing marred the smooth blankness of his wiry cheeks. Yet Clay Morgan knew what lay behind that mask—the shocking fear, the wild clawing of desperation, the scheming and the hoping, the fatal insight; and though Morgan had never liked the man he had his stir of admiration and pity. This was showdown for a fellow who had gambled his life; now in the showdown, with all his luck running out, he wasn't breaking.

During this time two other bits of side-play caught Clay Morgan's attention—Rusey's change of position and the sudden appearance of Pete Borders at the corner of the Mountain House hotel. By all the rules of the book Borders had less security in this town than Ollie Jacks, for Borders was known as a rustler far more ambitious than Jacks had ever been. Jacks was a weak man caught by a daring he wasn't big enough to carry off, whereas Borders was the kind to make his audacity stick and now to appear here, contemptuous of them all.

The long silence held on, as though everybody waited for something to come. Ollie Jacks reached at his shirt pocket and produced his tobacco. He put his head down while he rolled the cigarette, the brim of his hat shading his eyes, and he was thinking, Clay Morgan knew, of each last thin chance he had. Morgan watched the man's fingers roll the cigarette back and forth until the paper began to crush and the tobacco

to spill. There was a growing sharpness to Jacks's shoulder-points until at last, when Jacks could no longer endure it, he dropped the cigarette and pulled up his head and showed this town the gray bitter color of his face. His glance struck into the street, point by point; he looked at Herendeen, at Rusey, at Gentry's stable, and at last he looked straight to Clay Morgan. His shoulders dropped and he seemed to let a great breath out of him; and, still staring at Morgan, he came across the dust.

"Clay," he said, "I never did you no wrong, did I?"

"Not that I know of."

Sweat ran its oil-shine across Ollie Jacks's face; his lips were small and sharp and his eyes—not eyes that any man could trust—clung to Morgan. "No," he said, "I never did you any wrong. I never set foot on an inch of your range in my life. That's something, ain't it? I'm not lyin'. The jury gave me a break, but I know what all this means. All I want is a chance to ride out of this town."

Morgan slowly turned the cigar in his mouth. The weight of the town was on him; all the eyes of Herendeen's crowd had swung to him. He saw the way Charley Hillhouse slowly shook his head, signaling him to keep out of it. He watched Jesse Rusey make a half-turn to more accurately face him. Hack Breathitt came from the drugstore with Janet, reached the middle of the street, and stopped at once. He bent down and whispered to her, and sent her on to McGarrah's. Pete Borders hadn't moved from the corner of the Mountain House hotel. There was nothing good in Ollie Jacks; never had been and never would be. If he got away from Herendeen now he would be back in the hills again, once more rustling. Morgan knew it, yet said: "Wait here, Ollie," and walked toward Herendeen.

The group around Herendeen gave ground as he came up. Lige White said in a puzzled voice, "Don't interfere, Clay," and Gurd Grant shook his head. They were all cattlemen and so was he; but they felt a difference in him now and didn't like it. Ben Herendeen remained against the locust tree. His round, long jaw ran back to flat ears, to a tall forehead and close-cut sandy hair; he was no older than Morgan, no more than twenty-nine, with a ruddy unlined face. He was

heavy and swell-chested. His chin threw the lower lip over the upper, adding to the square bulldog cast of his expression; and he hated Clay Morgan, and had hated him as far back as boyhood.

Morgan said: "My daughter is in town. I don't want her scared—"

"Clay," said Lige White, "step over here a moment. I want to explain something—"

"Later, Lige. Not now."

Herendeen said in his bluntly unanswerable manner: "Everybody's been talking about things being legal. So we made this legal and see what happened. We won't make that mistake again. You're wrong, Clay. Better get right."

"Never mind," said Morgan. They saw him now as he seldom was, the quick angles of his face showing up. The change was instant; he had no smoothness, no reasonableness. What he said was a challenge—he meant it that way and wanted them to know it. No qualifications, no arguing. "As long as Janet is in town I want no racket about this. If there is a racket I'll take care of the man that made it." He swung around, speaking to Ollie Jacks. "You're all right in town, Ollie. But when you leave, that's your grief."

"Whoa!" said Herendeen. "I'll make what damned racket I please."

Morgan came about fast enough to make Lige White jerk his head aside. Morgan said: "All right, Ben. If you want it, you can have it now."

It shocked everybody still, this challenge so unexpected and so deadly in a quick-tempered country. It caught Herendeen with his guard down. Charley Hillhouse's mouth fell open. Gurd Grant showed Morgan a stunned wonder; and then everybody was waiting for Herendeen to say the only thing he could say. Nobody accepted that kind of talk. Herendeen stepped away from the locust tree, the bright flame of anger in his eyes.

"I'll just go along with you—"

Jesse Rusey's voice, very soft and very sure, broke in: "Nothin's goin' to happen to Ollie Jacks inside this town."

Herendeen turned at once. The marshal had come to the edge of the group. He stood by, short and quite broad, with

no change on his face. Blood rushed to Herendeen's cheeks until they were a dark-stained red. He gave Rusey a killing glance and looked over to Ollie Jacks who remained by the saloon. Pete Borders had drifted forward as far as Gentry's stable; he had the point of a shoulder against the stable wall and he stared on with a latent, amused insolence. Herendeen watched him a moment and then looked at Morgan again. There was this long interval in which he had seen these four men, Rusey, Ollie Jacks, Pete Borders, and Morgan; and after that something changed in his head and his eyes showed a gray, heated smartness. He spoke in a level voice.

"I've got some business to finish during the week, Morgan. When that's done I'll see you. That is all I care to say."

"Fine," answered Morgan, and walked away. Behind him, the astonished silence still held.

He passed the courthouse and went into the post office, rapping at the wicket until Fred Rich came out of the back room.

"No notice yet on Government Valley?"

"No," said the postmaster.

"I want to know when it comes."

"I'll post it on one of the buildings in the valley. That's regulation."

"Sure," said Morgan and turned to go. He met Lige White and Gurd Grant at the doorway. They waved him back into the post office lobby, both of them dead serious. Gurd Grant was a man close to thirty, red-headed and pretty cool; Lige White was older. These two operated outfits almost as large as Herendeen's; they were long friends of Morgan but they were irritated with him now, and told him so.

Lige White said: "You had no call to talk to Herendeen like that. Now there's hell to pay. You know very well he'll have to call you on those words. I want you to take this right, from me—you were mighty foolish. Everybody knows you two boys don't care much for each other, but that gives you no license to insult him on this matter. What's Ollie Jacks to you, anyhow?"

"Nothing," answered Morgan.

Lige White threw up his hands. "Then, why?"

Morgan only shook his head, still smiling. The smile fur-



ther irritated Lige White, who said: "You must be crazy. We've all got to stick together. I don't know how we're going to do this, but we'll have to patch up this quarrel somehow. Come over to the saloon with me. We'll have a drink, and then maybe Gurd can get Herendeen to join us. We can talk about it."

Morgan still held his cigar. He lighted it again, letting these two wait for his answer. He said: "Ben Herendeen is pretty proud. Damn a man that brings his outfit down here to scare hell out of one small-time rustler. Tell him that."

Lige White said: "I never saw you this way before. There must be something else."

"Maybe there is."

Lige White shrugged his shoulders. "All right, Clay. Your funeral, not mine. Let's go, Gurd."

He watched them return to the group under the locust trees. Pete Borders turned back from Gentry's stable and traveled along the opposite walk. He looked over to Morgan, showing the latter a deeply interested expression. This scene had puzzled him as much as the others; he was trying to figure its meaning. Jesse Rusey hadn't moved. Ollie Jacks still stood against the wall of the saloon, as though tied hand and foot. The man was waiting out this long, dangerous stretch of time, fearing the slightest motion. Herendeen watched him, and the group around Herendeen held tight. Morgan showed nothing on his face, but the feeling in him ran quick and hard and restless, made so by the dragging suspense. Suddenly Herendeen said something to Charley Hillhouse, who walked over to Jesse Rusey. Hillhouse spoke a quiet word, whereupon Rusey shook his head. Charley Hillhouse returned to Herendeen, carrying back the message, and then Herendeen gestured with one arm and crossed to the Long Grade, going inside. The group dissolved. Herendeen's riders drifted into the street aimlessly, but Morgan saw that they were still watching Ollie Jacks. There would be no trouble for a little while, he guessed; he brought a fresh match to his cigar.

Janet had gone into McGarrah's store, but all this while Hack Breathitt remained in the middle of the street, missing none of the scene. As soon as Herendeen entered the saloon

Breathitt came over to Morgan. Excitement brightened his restless blue eyes; the strain of all this had kinked his nerves.

"I never saw you do that before, Clay."

"What were you standing out there for?" Morgan asked.

Hack showed a small, embarrassed grin. "What you think?"

"My grief—not yours, Hack."

"Maybe, maybe not." But the small man shook his head.

"You're too smart to spout off like that unless you had it all figured out. So you got something in your coco. I wish I knew. When you leaving town?"

"After dinner."

"I'll stick around until then," said Hack dryly, and headed for the saloon.

The sun was gone from desert and sky, leaving a soft blue-running light behind. The supper triangle began to beat up its iron clanging from the porch of the Mountain House hotel. The Red Canyon stage rolled out of the hills, made a howling swing into Main Street and stopped before the hotel in smoky eddies of dust. Morgan left the post office doorway, still interested in the way the Three Pines riders—Herendeen's outfit—scattered themselves along the street. When he passed the hotel he saw Lige White's wife standing in the doorway, a repressed expression on her face. He stopped and removed his hat and spoke pleasantly; she was, he thought, the most self-contained woman in the country. When she smiled she became ten years younger, but, as always, a shadow remained in her eyes. Like worry, or like some unhappiness deeply hidden. Janet had appeared at McGarrah's doorway and was calling his name.

Mrs. White, who had no children of her own, said gently: "She has the prettiest hair, Clay. I wish you'd let her stay with me sometime."

"I'll ask her," said Clay Morgan. He turned over the dust, once more running the street with his careful glance. A Three Pines man stood by the post office corner, and one loitered at the arch of Gentry's corral. Jesse Rusey wasn't to be seen. Ollie Jacks left his spot by the saloon, crossed the street and walked beneath the board awnings, as far as the hotel. He put his arm on the porch rail. His head was lowered but Morgan saw his hat jerk a little. The man was dead,

even as his mind clawed at the thought of escape; and he knew he was dead. A Three Pines rider walked by Morgan, going down to the brick and dobe buildings of Old Town. From the doorway of McGarrah's, Morgan watched that man turn and block the way for Ollie Jacks. Ollie Jack's arm slowly fell from the hotel's porch rail; he swung around and started back for the stable, walking as though a heavy weight pushed at his shoulders and at his knees. Morgan caught one good glimpse of his face; it was thin and old with strain.

Janet took his hand. They went on through the store, into the back quarters. Yellow lamplight poured on the red-checked tablecloth, splintering brilliantly against the glass cruets. Ann McGarrah was in the kitchen, dishing the meal; he passed on to the rear porch, took off his coat and scrubbed away the riding dust. When he returned to the dining room they were waiting for him—Janet and Ann.

Sometimes, in his long riding hours, Clay Morgan's thoughts turned to the puzzle of his future and always, in that pondering, there came a time when he saw Ann McGarrah's face and heard the even melody of her voice. Her eyes were deep brown, with stillness, with depth. Black hair ran smoothly away from forehead and temples. Her lips, red and expressive, could quickly smile, or could hold the soft curve of soberness. He was never sure of her thinking, never certain of what her eyes meant when she watched him, but the slow gesturing of her hands and the small swing of her shoulders displayed a grace that never ceased to capture his attention. She never tired a man, she never asked anything of him. Always, when she spoke, she held him gently distant.

"Like home," he said.

She looked at him carefully. "What should home be like? Men have different notions."

"I wish," said Janet, "you would tell Daddy not to cut up my meat. I'm nine years old now."

"I keep forgetting," said Morgan. "Hard for me to recall you're practically a lady. Just a little while back, it seems, you were in a high chair, spilling milk. That's how time goes." He was watching Janet and he was smiling, knowing that this reference to babyhood always teased her. This was how Ann McGarrah best remembered him, this was the side of him

that made her still and watchful and a little sad—this sight of this man idle in the chair, loosened and idle and affectionately amused with his daughter. He was big-boned and long-armed. There wasn't any fat on him. The edge of his jaws were sharp against a heavy tanned skin and his nose had a small break to the bridge. Most people in this country were his solid friends but he had a few bitter enemies, and to those he always showed the autocratic side of his heart, as he had shown it to Ben Herendeen. This was the odd part about him, the mixture of gentle patience and stiff independence. Few people knew Clay Morgan as Ann McGarrah knew him, few had seen the contradiction of his character; for with him, her eyes were patient and her ears always listened. And she knew what almost nobody else knew: This man had never forgotten, never would forget, his first wife.

They ate, idly talking, idly arguing. The druggist's boy, Fred Tanner, came to the back yard and called Janet's name. Janet moved restlessly in her seat until Morgan nodded. As soon as she had gone, Ann McGarrah said: "You'll be riding a lot this week. Let Janet stay here."

Morgan smiled. "What is it this time, Ann?"

She said candidly: "A new dress, Clay. And her hair."

He said: "I guess there are some things I can't do for her."

"I can do those things for her. I like to. I want to." But when she said this her manner changed and her eyes were cool and her voice pushed him away. "I don't mean that the way it sounds. For her, Clay. Not for you."

His head was lifted and he was listening to the thinned report of a man's loud voice on the street; he was straight in his chair, his mind and temper changing back to the world out there. She knew what he was thinking, for she had been on the porch when he had challenged Herendeen. She said in a subdued voice:

"I'm not surprised you were willing to quarrel with him. It goes back a long way. You never forget anything."

He said, politely unrevealing: "What?"

"Clay," she said, "your memory is too long. Someday it will kill you."

He bowed his head a little, as if in agreement. He had lighted a cigar, holding it between his fingers while he lis-

tened. His eyelids crept nearer and his lips rolled together in stubborn fixture. Lamplight, sliding across the surface of his cheeks, darkened and sharpened the reverse angles. She saw in him then those things his friends loved—the tenacity and the faithfulness that never wavered, and she saw, too, the things that made his enemies hate him with such full-hearted bitterness. For as he was a man to stay by his friends for good or bad to the very end of time, so he was a man who returned dislike with an equal passion and an equal ruthlessness. Qualities people loved, and qualities they could hate—this was what she thought and kept her face smooth so that he might not see how she felt. She had never dared to let him see.

He got up, smiling at her. "Don't worry over my affairs."

"Not yours. You will always do as you want to do. Nobody will ever be able to change your mind."

He said in some surprise, "Am I that unreasonable?"

"Not unreasonable, Clay," she reminded him. "Something different than that. You just don't change. But there is one thing—about Janet. What happens to her if you die?"

"I don't know."

She rose and came around the table. She was near enough that she had to lift her eyes. Her cheeks were colored by the room's heat. "Clay," she said in a swift urgency, "there are only two people you could be thinking of, if that happened. Think of me, then. I want her."

He said, "Thanks for the supper, Ann," and walked on through the store to the front porch. She followed him; she was beside him when he paused on the street. Janet ran forward from the store's back alley, out of breath and laughing. At this moment Morgan's interest was wholly on the street. Ann McGarrah saw how closely he studied the roundabout shadows. It was a carefulness that he had always had, as though the need of it had been burned in him since the beginning. Darkness rolled tidally down the hills, filling War Pass. Lights glinted through window and doorway and made yellow fanwise pools on the walks and the night breeze bore in sage scent and pine scent from the upper country. The Burnt Ranch stage stood before the hotel, ready to go. Morgan's attention clung to the dark area around Gentry's cor-



ral a long while. Afterwards he said to Janet: "You're staying here for a few days. Let's take a walk before I start home."

Ann McGarrah knew where they were going. Paused by the store's doorway, she watched these two, the tall shape of the man and the slender figure of the girl side by side, go down into Old Town, Janet's small hand gripping her father's. One light illumined them a moment, then they were lost beyond Old Town as they walked toward the cemetery. Ann McGarrah stood still; she put her hands together, turned bitter by what she knew.

Beyond Old Town a creek came out of the hills and crossed under the road with a liquid lapping. Past the creek the round-topped wooden headboards of the cemetery glowed vaguely white under the moonlight. Following the irregular row, Morgan stopped before his wife's grave. Janet's hand gripped his fingers more tightly and she stood quite close to him. There was a child's dread of the unknown in her. He didn't want it to trouble her, so he said casually: "Next time I come to town, we must cut the grass here and paint the board again."

She said: "Do I look like her, Daddy?"

"When you are eighteen, Janet, you will look exactly as she looked. That was the year we were married."

He heard her soft, long sigh. "It would be so nice to have a mother."

This was the thing that hit him so hard, his daughter's loneliness for a mother. He stood at the foot of the grave, with his hat removed, thinking back to that long-gone night when Lila Durrie, so full of life and laughter and recklessness, had smiled to him across the dance hall's width, putting everything into her round black eyes. At eighteen a man was like the blowing wind; he had gone over, knowing there would be a fight. Ben Herendeen had brought her to the dance and Ben Herendeen stood by, quietly raging. When the music started Lila Durrie looked up at the sullen Herendeen, laughed at him and took Clay Morgan's arm, dancing away. At the doorway they had stepped out; down by the row of buggies, in the bland black night, they had stood a moment, no longer cool and no longer laughing. Even now Morgan remembered the sharpness, the wild intensity of his

feelings as he kissed her and heard her whisper in his ears. "Clay—Clay, do you love me?" They had gone immediately to his rig. At daylight in War Pass, forty miles away, they were married.

Janet's fingers tugged at him. "Didn't you ever have a picture, Daddy?"

"No," he said. "She never had one taken."

There hadn't been time for a picture or for much of anything else. At that time he owned a small ranch in the Lost Hills and ran a few cows on it. This was where they set up housekeeping, a long way from town, a long way from dances or from her friends. She had been used to better things and couldn't help remembering it. She was a stormy girl, so rash in anger, so quick to seek laughter, by turns so terribly forlorn and so tempestuously happy. Four months after their marriage Herendeen rode up to the place and stepped from the saddle. From the far corner of the meadow, Clay had seen this. When he reached the house Herendeen was laughing and she was laughing but that laughter stopped soon enough, for Herendeen said: "Why stick so close to the house, Clay? Don't you trust your wife?"

Morgan drew the cigar from his mouth, feeling some of the fury of that fight. He had rushed against Herendeen, hearing his wife's scream of protest. Herendeen started laughing again, but when they were finished, both exhausted and drained dry and badly beaten, there was no amusement in Herendeen. That hurt still came back to plague Morgan, even now; he remembered how he walked to the corral and hung his elbows against it to keep from falling, and how blindly Herendeen staggered toward his horse. He had whipped Herendeen in that fight and yet he had lost; for, five months later, shortly after Janet's birth, Lila had looked up from her bed, white and strengthless, all her love gone, and whispered: "I should tell you something, Clay. I made a mistake. It was Ben I wanted to marry. You and I are not at all alike." And so she had died.

He brought himself out of all this with effort and replaced his hat. "I think," he told Janet, "we'd better go."

Janet reached down and patted the dust of her mother's grave, murmuring, "everybody says you were very beautiful."

He had turned away. But he turned back, holding the warm small hand of his daughter within his own big fingers, knowing that in his daughter's head was a wistful and wonderful image of her mother—an image made out of a child's longing. Like a fairy tale, he thought, that had to be bright and always fair. So he said: "Yes, she was, Janet. There never was a mother like her. She had black hair. It was very long and sunlight made it shine. Her eyes were the same color as yours. She was never angry and never afraid and she loved us both. When you were just three days old she sang a song to make you sleep. The song was 'Ben Bolt.' She had a lovely voice. You will be like her and you will always see her when you look in the mirror."

She remained silent, drinking in his description, storing those words in her retentive memory. She drew a long, pleased sigh; the pressure of her hand grew greater on his fingers, and afterwards they turned through Old Town, walking in silence. He had made her happy.

He was thinking of this, pleased by her pleasure, when he saw a low-bent and shadowy shape run from the alley adjoining the Mountain House hotel and whip across the street toward Mike Boylan's blacksmith shop. This was in the corner building of Old Town, and Mike Boylan, late-working, had hung a lantern above the shop's wide double-door. A saddle horse stood loose before Boylan's rack, toward which the running man aimed. Farther up the street somebody shouted a warning and a Three Pines rider rushed forward from McGarrah's store. Slowly pacing forward toward Mike Boylan's shop, Morgan identified the runner as soon as the latter entered the yellow arc of the lantern's light. It was Ollie Jacks.

Ollie Jacks's breath was a lunging, painful sound in the night as he rushed against the horse, threw himself into the saddle and clawed at the reins. For a brief moment his face came around and Morgan saw the constricted desperation on it; then Ollie Jacks slashed the horse away from the blacksmith shop, turned into the gap between Old Town and McGarrah's store, and raced downslope into the desert.

Janet's hand gripped Clay Morgan's fingers. "What's the matter, Daddy?"

"Nothing," he said, "nothing but Ollie Jacks having some

fun." He quickened his step, coming into the gap and halting there as a pair of Three Pines men reached it. Herendeen arrived, saying: "Get your horses," and then these men were facing Clay Morgan. One of them had drawn his gun to take a shot at the retreating Ollie Jacks. He held the gun half out of the holster, staring at Morgan, but Ollie Jacks was gone and it was too late and he let the gun drop back, shrugging his shoulders. Three Pines men were riding up behind Herendeen and Herendeen's face was red and round.

The echo of Ollie Jacks's horse made a dying tattoo in the blackness, out in the desert. Other Three Pines riders were rushing from town by the stage road. Morgan said, courteous and quiet: "Maybe Janet and I are in your way. We'll step aside."

"No," said Herendeen, rage running behind his false-cool tone. "There is nothing to hurry about. There's a time for everything, Clay. Good evening, Janet."

Janet said in her precise, little-woman's voice: "Good evening." Morgan pulled her gently on to McGarrah's porch. Ann McGarrah waited there. Part of the Three Pines crew galloped toward the desert, after Ollie Jacks. Herendeen walked up the street, his boots lifting dust.

Morgan said, "I'll ride along, honey. Be back in a few days. You have a good time." He reached down and kissed her, feeling the warmth of her hands as she held them at the back of his neck. He was smiling as he straightened, smiling at Janet, and then at Ann McGarrah's attentive eyes. Out on the desert a gun sounded, quick and faint, and was echoed by two other shots. That was all. Ann McGarrah saw the smile die and saw the flame of temper in his eyes. They both knew Ollie Jacks was dead. Herendeen had respected Morgan's challenge; that and nothing more. Morgan lifted his hat, noting how Ann McGarrah's arm rested on Janet's shoulder. He said, "Good night," and turned into the street.

Mrs. White was on the porch of the Mountain House, and called to him in her even-calm voice: "If you see Lige at the Long Grade, Clay, tell him I'm ready to go home."

"I'll see if I can find him," said Morgan. Walking slowly up the street, he passed Rusey at the corner of the bank and noticed Pete Borders in the post office shadows. He stepped

into the Long Grade, seeing most of the men of the town here, but not Lige White. Charley Hillhouse slouched at a corner of the bar. Charley looked at him, not moving. Afterwards Morgan went to his horse at Gentry's and spoke to the hostler in the runway. "Take Janet's horse, Parr. She's staying in town."

He wanted a word with Hack Breathitt, but Hack wasn't around, and so he followed the upper road from War Pass, passing into a brief stand of pine. Two or three houses lay back in these trees. When he came by one of them—Mrs. Benson's house—he saw the glint of a cigarette on the shadow-blackened porch and heard Lige White quietly laughing. Mrs. Benson was there, suddenly suppressing her voice. The road bent away from the pines and dropped into the Powder Desert and a little wind rolled out of the south. Clay Morgan rode on, thinking of Mrs. White on the porch of the Mountain House hotel, a proud woman with old hurt shadowing her eyes. He knew what the hurt was.

After Morgan had gone Mrs. White went into the stuffy red plush stillness of the women's parlor of the hotel. She sat straight in a chair, hands folded, her eyes sightlessly fixed to a far wall. Across the hall was the hotel's bar, and now and then, though she was too deep in her own thoughts to give much heed, she heard the burst of men's laughter. The night stage to Rhett's Station, nine hours over the hills from War Pass, came to the front of the hotel and, a half hour later, went away. This was eight o'clock. At ten o'clock, still seated in the chair, close-mouthed and proud, she saw Lige White come to the parlor door. He had been drinking and his black hair curled down from his forehead, giving him an air of amused humor. At forty-five he still held his youthful attraction and at forty-five he still kept his perfect manners toward her. She went by him, out to the rig, and sat in silence as he trotted the team from War Pass toward the ranch, fifteen miles away. She had her hands folded in her lap, she held her head straight, so that he couldn't see how swiftly her eyes sought Mrs. Benson's house when they passed it. Once in that fifteen miles he said, courteously: "Tired?"

"No."

Near midnight Hack Breathitt, tiring of the Long Grade,

came down to the bar of the Mountain House for his last drink. Finished with it, he stepped into the center hall, not yet knowing whether he would put up here for the night or ride out. A little drunk, he paused to think of it and at last turned, choosing to ride out. As he left the Mountain House, Helen Lavalle came to the window of her room on the second floor and watched him go.

### 3 ROUNDUP FIRES

Clay Morgan ate breakfast by lamplight and was in the saddle before day crossed the eastern hills. Harry Jump and Cap Vermilye were at roundup in the Haycreek Hills, leaving only Mose, too old for such riding, and the Mexican cook, Pancho, on the ranch. Morgan said to Mose: "I'll probably be back after dark. Put some new crosspieces on the front gate—it's coming apart," and set forth southward across his range. At this elevation the night air was sharp enough to bite through his vest and cotton shirt. The big bay horse shot away on a run. Morgan let him have his run.

Mogul's rim lay two miles north, behind him. The ranch house and its corrals and barns sat at the foot of the rising Mogul Hills, which ran straight south; along the base of these hills, following the ruts of a casual road, Clay Morgan took his way. To his left, a half mile, another string of hills lifted up, so creating the long and narrow valley he followed. This was his range, emerging slowly from the ink-gray twilight. The bed of a small dry lake began to show its spotless white glitter ahead. Here and there a streak of green ran down the hillsides, indicating summit springs. At the base of these green spots, in the valley, stood square stacks of cut hay. Elsewhere, the low-growing bunchgrass, dried by the heat of summer and fall, painted the valley and the hillsides amber-yellow. A band of antelope, disturbed by the sound of Morgan's horse, raced down the hillside, crossed before him with the speed of wind and struck the lake bed in great clouds of ripped-up dust, the signal patches of their rumps showing whitely. When first sunlight burst across the eastern peaks Morgan was six miles down the valley and at the end of his

own range. A small ridge lay in front of him; at the summit he reined in to look at the round bowl of Government Valley.

Once it had been a reservation for the Piutes and the site of a military post to guard the trail between California and the Montana mines. Now the Indians were gone and the military post was an abandoned row of dobe houses partly destroyed by the intrusions of wintering cattle. A creek crossed it, flowing through a gap into Herendeen's Three Pines. Both he and Herendeen grazed their beef on it, though it was still held by the Government. There had been talk recently that the land office meant to post auction notices on it, which was why Clay Morgan had spoken to the postmaster in War Pass. It was a choice, rich section and a valuable addition to any man's outfit. Dropping into the valley, he quartered toward the abandoned buildings to see if a notice of sale might be on them; and finding nothing, he crossed the amber grassy floor, surmounted another small ridge and saw the mixed flats and broken hills of Herendeen's range, butting into the distant Potholes. More westerly, in the mountain country, lay Gurd Grant's Crowfoot. Eastward, out on the flat glitter of the open desert, was the outline of the windmill on Lige White's Running W. Morgan saw dust boiling near the Potholes, which was the roundup crew at work; he turned that way.

Ducking in and out of the small ravines of the land he came upon cattle and young stuff occasionally grazing, herding these before him and throwing them back toward the roundup crew. Three men were working this section—Charley Hillhouse and two other Three Pines hands. He drove his small collection of beef into the held bunch and started on another circle, Hillhouse accompanying him. Around ten o'clock, having dragged the north end, they started the held bunch back for the main roundup.

The sun was a copper-red flare in the middle sky and the dust began to thicken behind the herd. Morgan dropped back to the drag, throwing his neckpiece over his nose. Charley Hillhouse, on a flank of the beef, motioned one of the other men to take his place and joined Morgan and made his first speech in two hours.

"I been thinkin' over last night, Clay. Hard to figure."

"Let it slide, Charley."

Charley Hillhouse retorted, "It won't slide," and stared before him. He was a compact, capable man, not given to much talk; the type to worry a lot of things around in his head, to reach his own answers and hold his own conclusions. A Three Pines rider pushed against the flank of the straying herd, yipping, "Hi—hi—hi!" Charley Hillhouse's clever horse shot in against the rear of the beef, checking a bolt, and then Charley came beside Morgan again, still staring in front of him.

"A man's got to stick with his kind, Clay. Ollie Jacks was a crook. Why take his side?"

"A break, Charley."

Charley Hillhouse had a dry answer for that. "He had his break a long time ago—and didn't take it. A crook's always a crook."

"Maybe," agreed Morgan. "But last night when he came out of the courthouse I got to thinking—it might have been me, or you."

Hillhouse, disgruntled by the unpredictable side of a man who had been his friend for so many years, took this last remark almost as an affront. "Don't talk like that. If I ever get on the wrong side of the line, I hope God strikes me dead. Right's right and wrong's wrong. You should stay out of the dirty messes men like Ollie Jacks make for themselves. I don't like to hear you go soft."

Morgan was smiling behind the bandanna; the reflection of it showed in his eyes and in the quick crow-track wrinkles at the edge of his temples. He murmured: "All right, Charley. I'll change the tune, when I see Herendeen."

"Be a mighty bitter tune," commented Hillhouse, "for one of you. I will say no more."

They pushed the beef down a ravine and out into a flat plain upon which lay the dust smoke of cattle approaching from all points of the compass. A chuck wagon and a string of horses on picket showed in the foreground. Beyond it men rode through a held bunch of cattle, neatly cutting out the calves for branding and throwing the cows of the various outfits into each outfit's separate bunch. There was a bawling and a bleating through all this boiling dust, and the smell



of scorched hair and hide, and the resounding firecracker rattle of a man's cursing.

These roundups were always short-handed. Morgan took his place with Lige White, snaking calves out of the herd, dumping and dragging them to the brand fire and afterwards shagging them off to their proper bunches—Three Pines, Crowfoot, Long Seven, or Running W; there were, additionally, a couple of reps from ranches farther away to take care of cattle which had strayed into this range. Everybody worked. Somewhere around noon men left the dust to eat a quick meal, and ran back into the dust again. Herendeen, with two of his crew, rode out of the south with a fresh batch, ate his meal and went away; he had not directly looked at Clay Morgan. Gurd Grant came in from the hill country, driving everything he saw before him. Lige White's men were combing the desert over by Fanolango Pass. When the dust got too bad they hit the cook's coffee-pot and dashed back at the job. Every few hours the cutting men took fresh horses from the picket line.

Lige White's eyes were bloodshot and he didn't feel in the best of spirits. He said to Morgan: "I'm old enough to know better than to drink a quart of rye in one night. But, dammit, when a man starts tapering off it means he's getting old—and I hate to admit it. Fat cows, this year. How's Janet?"

"Fine. I left her in town."

"Damned pretty girl. Well, you're lucky, Clay. Mighty nice to have a youngster to ride the trail with, watchin' him grow and tellin' him what you know about things. I used to think that if I had a boy I'd sure show him the world. Hear the old owl hoot and listen to the cougar scrape his whiskers on the tent wall. Shake the frost off our blankets and ride the rim to see daylight come. I wish I had that boy."

It was, Clay Morgan knew, a sore spot in this handsome, likable Lige White—that he had no son. It was on his mind a good deal and he often spoke of it whenever he thought of Janet; any child drew his attention and his charming smile. He was always praising Janet and always wanting to buy her candy in his large-handed way. He was a man who had to put his affections somewhere. Through the middle of this sweaty, dusty afternoon's work, Morgan thought

about this intensely human streak in Lige White which seemed to find no outlet; then he remembered Mrs. White's set and calm expression and her quiet voice—and the misery of her eyes.

Herendeen and his men cleared the Haycreek Hills of the last straggling stock; Gurd Grant cleaned up the edge of the Potholes and came in. Running W had scoured Fanolango Pass, and at twilight this day the job was done, the brands segregated and held in separate herds. After supper Morgan started Harry Jump back to the Mogul range with the Long Seven beef, and the Crowfoot and Running W cuts went away, lumbering shadows in the moonlight, the scrape of feet and the click of those long horns and the plaintive "Baw" of the last calf riding back through the night-still air.

Dust and heat were gone and the campfire's flame, so still was this air, tapered upward to a blue-yellow, almost stationary point. Charley Hillhouse, who was wagon boss, said: "We'll move over and work the Antelope Plains tomorrow."

The cook swore around the shadows, harnessing his team. Afterwards the mess wagon went bumping away on its four-hour ride, to be ready on the Antelope Plains by daybreak. Lying on his blanket, head athwart the seat of his saddle, Clay Morgan listened to the dry groaning of the wagon wheels fade into this enormous night. He rolled a cigarette and savored its keen smell. Stars crowded the sky; they washed that limitless sweep of black with a diamond-glitter, all down to the black horizon's edge, until they seemed to fall below the rim of a flat world. Here and there in the pine summits coyotes began to hark up their mourning plaint, "Ar-ar-oo-oo." Hillhouse and Clay Morgan and Lige White sat by the fire, their cheeks sharply, taciturnly graced by light and shadows; and men lay blanketed in the background, weary and relaxed and cradled by their inward thinking. Herendeen walked forward from the shadows to stand high above this sprawled group. He tossed a sage stem into the fire and watched the pale and heatless flame rise. He was across from Clay Morgan; his eyes searched the crowd. The edges of his vest fell away from the rounds of his shoulders and the deep stretch of his chest; his bigness was all in proportion, legs and arms and torso; it was a muscular bigness,

a bigness of thick bones.

Cap Vermilye was a Long Seven man, the oldest rider of the lot and the most prolific storyteller. He said now, from the background: "Reminds me of a time in the Staked Plains. This was in Seventy-eight—"

Ben Herendeen broke in as if Cap Vermilye hadn't spoken. "Lige," he said, "I hear there's a new homesteader come to the spring Jim Spackman used to squat on."

"I heard so," said Lige White.

Cap Vermilye said no more and for a moment the silence was deep and different. A swift spark lighted Clay Morgan's resentment at Herendeen's intolerant interruption. He sat slowly up; he was near enough the fire to be seen. Charley Hillhouse turned his head suddenly to watch Morgan, a small crease of worry showing between his eyes.

"We'll warn him out of there tomorrow," said Herendeen. But when he stopped talking Clay Morgan knew he wasn't finished. Herendeen's thoughts were on his face, for everybody to see. "Or maybe we've got some great big soul in this crowd whose heart bleeds for people like that. Seems to be a hell of a lot of charity around here lately."

Morgan swayed forward to lift a burning sage stem from the fire; its oil-bright glow flickered against his cheeks, against his eyes. This silence held its waiting and its reserve. Morgan tossed the sage stem back into the fire, drawing a sharp glance from Charley Hillhouse. Lige White uncomfortably crossed his feet. Gurd Grant crouched by the blaze and revealed nothing on his scrupulously neutral face. Morgan relaxed gently on his shoulder blades and pillowed his head against the saddle. He said nothing but he saw the changing expression on Herendeen's cheeks. Herendeen had braced himself for trouble, he had maneuvered this talk around to make a break; but nothing happened and he stood a moment, uncertain and displeased, and afterwards walked away. He called back. "I'll see you tomorrow, Lige. You too, Gurd." Presently he left camp at a dead run.

Rolled in the blanket, Morgan smoked the cigarette to its end. When he had finished, the fire was a vague glow of ashes and the night's cold had crept in from the sky.

Instead of turning west to his own ranch, Herendeen trav-

eled due south toward a low range of hills which separated Running W from Three Pines. An hour's ride brought him within sight of a far-shining light, which was the mark of a homesteader's cabin against the hills; but when he came upon the homesteader's cabin, drifting into the heavy shadows at the base of these hills, a dog began to bark and suddenly the light died. He reined in before the cabin, feeling his contempt for the evident fear which had caused the homesteader to kill the light. They were all alike, these homesteaders, little men crawling as near the range as they dared, sticking their plows into the unplowed soil and slowly starving while the sun burnt up their crops and ruined the land ever afterward for graze. He could not tolerate this breed, or their sun-blackened wives, or their tow-headed children. They were aliens. They were no better than Indians. He sent his deep, blunt call at the shack. "Hey—come out here."

They were talking, inside. A boy's voice said, "Pa, don't go." A woman was talking, quickly and with suppressed excitement. The door squealed open and somebody stood in its black square, speechless.

"What are you doing here?" demanded Herendeen. "This place is on Lige White's range. We drove Jim Spackman away from it last year."

"You Lige White?" said a man in a dim, drawn voice.

"What the hell is that to you? My name's Herendeen and I asked you a question."

"Oh," said the man. "I'm Jack Gale. I bought Jim Spackman's rights to this place."

"He never had any rights to sell."

"He built the house, Mr. Herendeen." Then the man added, quietly, "It's free land, ain't it? I understood it was. I also understood Mr. White wouldn't mind."

Herendeen was nettled by the argument. "You damned nesters are all alike, trying to stand on this free-land business. You stick your plow into it and ruin it, and starve to death, and steal cattle to keep your kids alive, and move away. We're not in the game of providin' meat to nesters."

"I'll make my way," said Gale, peaceably, "and I don't ask for nobody's beef. I want no trouble."

"You got a fence around that spring?"

"Yes," said Gale reluctantly.

"Sure," grunted Herendeen. "Now you pull that fence down and you get out of this country by the end of the week."

For a moment Gale didn't answer. His breath sighed into the darkness and his feet scraped the doorsill. Spring water, dropping down the hillside, bubbled across the yard. Then Gale said in a halting, softening tone: "I don't see why—"

Herendeen said, "I don't want any argument. You hear?"

Gale's wife called from the interior of the house. "Jack, come in here. Come in." Herendeen heard her run over the floor. She caught hold of her husband and these two were gently wrestling around the doorway with Gale saying, "Now, Allie, stop it—stop it." But she pulled him inside and slammed the door. A child, very young, began to cry in a thin, startled rhythm. Herendeen pushed his horse over the yard, bound away for his ranch. The foot of the horse struck a loose pail, and this racket excited the beast and set him into a quick pitching. Herendeen slashed his spurs into the horse and fought him around the yard. The horse bucked sidewise, smashed into the wall of the shack, hard enough to stir it on its flimsy foundations. Herendeen swung the horse with the pressure of his big knees. He was angry in his quick, thoroughly destructive manner. He bawled: "By God, you be out of here by the end of the week or I'll burn you out!" and plunged his spurs into the horse again, rushing across the desert. Behind him was absolute silence. The baby had ceased crying suddenly, as though a hand had reached over its mouth to stifle it.

Leaving War Pass, Hack Breathitt fell into the Cache Mountains south of town and went nighthawking along the dimly starlit trails until he felt the need of sleeping; and so made camp and slept. Next day, controlled by no particular desire or fancy, he cruised the hills, as familiar with each gulch and each meadow and ridge as a man is familiar with the rooms and hallways of his house. These hills rolled upward to piny, cool crests beyond which, westward, lay another land of long distances; arrived at the summit he had his look and turned back, liking his own land too well to stray. In this timber he passed Three Pines cattle at graze; far southward he came upon a nester's house, and beyond

that arrived at the clearing of a small two-bit rancher by the name of Vance Ketchell. He had noon meal here, discussed the weather and traveled on; once, from a prow of these benchlands, he stood long enough to watch the scatter of houses, corrals and barns marking Herendeen's ranch, lying beside a shallow stream, lying between the short walls of a canyon. From the elevation he was able to look beyond that canyon to Grant's ranch at the base of the Haycreek Hills. Far up in Mogul, to the rear of other gray-cut hills, lay Clay Morgan's range. Below him, in Herendeen's valley, dust rose on the winding road, kicked up by a team. From this distance it looked like Mike Levi's storewagon; Mike made the rounds with an unfailing regularity, selling almost anything, needles and vanilla extract and cheap stock saddles and veterinary remedies.

It was all a part of a warm-bright summer's day. Hack Breathitt came down the bench into Herendeen's valley, though at a distance from the ranch, crossed over and lost himself in the broken, pine-covered ridges at the base of Mogul. Magpies flashed black and white ahead of him; at Dell Lake, a miniature pond of water surrounded by tules, he saw a few ducks bobbing. Still higher on the edge of Mogul he looked back to see the Burnt Ranch stage wind upgrade from the southwestern desert, tip over the lip of a low pass near Dell Lake and go on toward War Pass in funneling clouds of dust.

As he followed the net of trails leading upward to the Mogul, Hack Breathitt had no cares and no serious thoughts. This was a fine, warm day. Ahead of him on the pine-shadowed trail occasional golden shafts of sunlight slanted through the tree tops. Here and there a swirl of dust showed where an antelope had been a moment before. The silence was thick and held its rank scent of resin; and at intervals Hack sang incomplete bits of such songs as he knew, the sound of that going out around him in widening waves. Dusk caught him in this rough land, still without any thought of discretion; at full dark he turned a bend of the trail and saw firelight pulse against the side of a near-by ravine. He turned into the ravine and, being a smart young man, he called ahead of him to disturb nobody's nerves; "Hello—hello—hello!"

The fire, he found, was at the base of a bare rock wall running up the side of Mogul. A spring broke out of the mountain here and trees crowded down from adjacent ridges. There wasn't anybody within the range of firelight, but Hack reined in and held his seat, knowing that somebody had stepped into the shadows and was watching him. A moment later Pete Borders came forward.

"You make enough racket to raise the dead, Hack. Pull off your saddle if you ain't goin' any place."

Hack said, indolently amused: "Now where would I be goin'?" He stepped to the ground and relieved the horse of its gear. He watered it, put it out on picket; he had his own frying pan and coffeepot and presently was crouched at the fire with Borders, cooking up his quick meal.

Borders said: "Nothin' new?"

"A man," reflected Breathitt, "that never goes any place never hears anything."

They ate and lay back from the small blaze, each man alternately throwing in a small pine branch when the fire burned down. Hack was sprawled full length, propped on an elbow, nursing his cigarette. Borders sat crosslegged, a long-limbed man made loosely of wire and rope. He was redheaded and his eyes were the restless eyes of a man quick and untrusting and very curious. "Hack," he said, "whut you ride so much for?"

"Doctor's orders," said Breathitt and softly laughed.

Borders shook his head. "You got a bad doctor. Time's comin' when fellows like you and me ain't going to be safe sittin' around a fire this way."

Breathitt said, with a pointed humor: "There's a difference between you and me, Pete. I just ride."

"It won't make any difference, my boy," argued Pete Borders. "Good or bad, if Herendeen gets nervous, you ain't going to ride this country."

That talk set off something familiar in Hack's mind. He said, gently, "The sheep and the goats. Sure. I guess I'm one of the goats."

"See?" said Borders. "That's whut I mean."

He tossed a fresh stick into the fire, the flare of it heightening the rusty shine of his hair. He had a dry, smart face;

double wrinkles crossed his forehead. His eyes, on the edge of being green, were narrow-bright. He had been watching the livid heart of the flame, but his head rose and his eyes stared into the surrounding darkness. He was a tight, close-listening shape; and presently he rose and stepped into the shadows.

Somebody rode along the near-by trail slowly, and stopped. Hack Breathitt held his position, too clear of conscience to move. He poised the cigarette between his fingers, hearing the rider poke up the ravine. The rider said, "Just me—just old Parr Gentry lookin' for horses."

He came to the fire, this owner of the livery stable in War Pass. He rolled in the saddle, staring down at Hack Breathitt a long moment before recognizing him. "Why, hello, Hack. Didn't know I'd find you on this side of the Mogul. Thought you liked the other side best."

"Any side's all right," drawled Breathitt. Parr Gentry shifted his weight again, a little heavy to find comfort in his saddle. His face, by firelight, was round and solid-fleshed and darkly dull. His eyes rummaged this little clearing and saw Pete Borders' saddle and blanket on the far edge of the fire—and the two horses picketed near the spring. Breathitt realized Gentry knew Borders' horse. He held his silence, he took a drag on the cigarette. "Late for you, ain't it Parr?"

"Been draggin' this section all day, lookin' for horses. You seen a band around here?"

"Wild ones? They'd be clear to the top of Mogul in this weather."

"Lookin' for tracks," murmured Gentry. "Thought they might come down for water. Well, I'll be goin'. Long way to War Pass." He wheeled about, groaning softly as he went away. Breathitt listened to the man's horse reach the trail and scuff along it, and at last fade in the night.

Pete Borders stepped into the light. His face showed its smart disbelief. "He's been chasin' horses long enough to know why they ain't down here. And he wasn't pointed for War Pass when he left, either." Afterwards he added: "Didn't want to show myself. Won't do you any good to be seen campin' with me, old boy."

"He saw your horse."



Borders shook his head. He settled in his blanket just beyond the light; the fire died away and a small breeze rolled down the face of Mogul. Into this heart of quietness the spring dropped bubbling, crystal echoes. Borders said: "When a man's goin' to be chased like a wolf, my boy, he ought to get some meat for it. You're missin' a chance. There's a hell of a lot of cows in this country."

Breathitt threw the stub of his cigarette into the fire and settled on his blanket. He lay flat on his shoulder blades, staring at the ragged patch of sky above him. Not answering, he thought of a good many things at this moment; and saw no future for himself.

## 4 CATHERINE

At daybreak Clay Morgan rode as far as the Antelope Plains with the roundup crew and worked with it until mid-morning. Afterwards he set off to have a look at the grass and water on the western edge of the Moguls. Gurd Grant, having business at his own ranch, went along. Gurd was a big and completely friendly man of Morgan's age with light features and a consistently pleased expression in his eyes. There was no malice and no subterfuge of any kind in Gurd. But now, as he rode, he spoke in a rather troubled, uncertain way of Herendeen.

"You know, Clay, he ain't such a bad fellow. I hate to see you two start chewing the same piece of leather. Of course, you never did like each other. I can remember as far back as school when you and Ben got in some pretty tough jangles." He gave Clay a half-embarrassed glance. "I can also remember when you married Lila." He was on dangerous ground, and realized it, and cut off his remark with one brief addition. "That's part of your trouble with Ben, too."

Morgan didn't answer. He traveled with his glance thrown far ahead and there was nothing on his face for Gurd Grant to see. The tall fellow had this way of covering up, by silence and by a kind of indrawn composure. Gurd Grant said:—

"But we've all got to stick together, Clay. You been over to that Freewater settlement lately?"

"No."

"Ride over sometime. You'll see a lot of little trails coming out of the mountains to it. What made those trails? Your beef and mine and Lige White's and Herendeen's. That's supposed to be a bunch of homesteaders over there. Hell, they're a bunch of brand changers. They're living off us, and making a mighty prosperous thing of it, too. Ben wants to stop that. So do I. So do you. That's right, isn't it?"

"Not sure," said Morgan, quietly.

"Why, hell," grumbled Gurd Grant, "what's wrong with a cattleman fighting for his rights?"

Morgan shifted in the leather. "This is what's wrong," he said. "Ben Herendeen never had any brains and never will."

"Don't let an old quarrel get you off on the wrong foot," argued Gurd Grant. "The important thing is to stick together. We got to do that."

"Gurd," said Morgan, turning toward his partner, "I want to warn you. Ben's the kind of a fellow that gets worse the farther he goes. Maybe he'll start by chasing a few crooks out of the country. But he won't stop there. He'll get the idea that nobody has any rights unless they're riding close to him. When he does that, he'll start a first-class war—and you'll be the goat. Stay clear of it, Gurd."

"We've got to stick together," insisted Gurd.

Riding on through the short hills, they came to Crowfoot's quarters seated in a small round valley backed against the Haycreek Hills. A creek, charging out of the pine timber, crossed the meadow in front of a low, long-galleried white house surrounded by poplar trees. The two dismounted in this pleasant shade and went back to the dining room for a late noon meal. They were still at the table when a single rider came out of the hill trail at a full gallop. A moment later Catherine Grant appeared.

"Gentlemen," she said, "you are both very solemn."

Gurd Grant held his seat with a brother's habitual indifference but Clay Morgan rose at once before this laughter-loving girl with the gay and gently blue eyes. This was Catherine Grant, who, with her brother Gurd, ran Crowfoot. She was dressed in a full dark riding skirt. A small hat lay atop a mass of hair the color of red and copper; the run had whipped her cheeks pink, it had lifted her spirits and turned

her vitally alive. She had long, full, firm lips; she was tall for a woman, with self-reliant shoulders. The riding skirt pulled tightly at her hips, showing the depth and the roundness of her upper body. She had one glance for her brother, slanting and a little amused; and a show of quick pleasure at Clay Morgan's presence.

"Once," she reflected, "there was a man named Morgan. He lived on top of a mountain and never did come down. He grew a beard, so they say, and got the habit of talking to himself. I wonder whatever happened to him?"

"Crazy as always," said Gurd. "And quit running your horse down that trail, you hear?"

She didn't hear. She stood in front of Clay, stripping away her riding gloves—smiling and watching his answering smile break the solid healthy darkness of his face. Gurd Grant sat as an interested and forgotten spectator to this scene, quick to note his sister's instant gaiety in front of Clay, and Clay's lightening expression. There always had been an odd closeness between these two people. Sometimes, as now, that closeness puzzled him and sometimes bothered him; he never could get at its meaning. All he knew was that whenever they met they seemed to share some old memory which excluded everybody else, as now. He rose and left the room.

The cook brought Catherine her meal. She sat opposite Clay, eating a little and talking a little. Clay lighted a smoke. He braced his elbow on the table, chin propped in his long, heavy hand. "Your hair," he said, "is getting darker."

"That's gray you see. Gray from worry."

"When you were eighteen it was almost a carrot red."

She said: "I remember you said that once, a long time ago. It almost made me cry. I came home and wondered if I could dye it."

"We used to talk pretty straight, didn't we? We had some tall quarrels."

She gave him a straight, smileless look. "Why did we ever quarrel, Clay?"

"Maybe," he said, "it was because we always stuck together and had so damned much fun." He wasn't sure of what he wished to say. This girl was a close, deep part of his life. Once, she had been nearer to him than any other woman.

Some of that old feeling remained, so that when he sat by her now he had a feeling of pleasant ease; knowing that he had to explain nothing to her, knowing that she understood. He said: "When a fellow is pretty young, he's not apt to think of other people's feelings. I'd as soon cut off a hand as to hurt you, Catherine."

She looked down at the motionless shape of her hands on the table. "I think I like you better when you're not so polite. The quarrels were pretty real. We meant what we said." And then she met his glance. "Well, it is nice to remember that you were once so angry that you wanted to rough me up."

He couldn't hold back his grin. "Did that once, too."

"Yes," she said, so gently, "you did, once."

This room was shaded and cool. Outside the hot drowse of afternoon lay over the land and Gurd Grant's voice, speaking to some hand by the corrals, echoed distinctly across the drowsy quiet. Catherine said: "How's Janet?"

"In good health. I left her in town for a few days with Ann McGarrah."

Catherine Grant's composed expression didn't change. "You should let her visit with women as much as you can, Clay. A girl needs that."

"I'm beginning to notice it."

Catherine said: "She looks enough like Lila to startle me."

"Yes," said Clay. "Well, it is still a long ride home." But for a moment he held his place, finding complete satisfaction in Catherine Grant's presence. His own life was rather rough and rather bare; it helped a good deal to watch the color of Catherine's hair and the soft lines of her lips, to hear the melody of her voice. She was a graceful, competent girl, with warmth to her and strong feelings behind her laughter—and a pride that he had often hurt, though she had never told him. He didn't say anything. He watched her over the width of the table, he held the steady return glance of her eyes; and this went on until he felt some of the heat of those earlier days when he had ridden with her and danced with her and kissed her, and had felt the soft, wild, half-giving and half-refusing strength of her body.

Suddenly she rose and turned away, knowing what was in his mind. He left the table, following her out to the house

porch. He said: "See you later, Catherine."

"All right, Clay."

She stood on the porch, watching him go. At the far lip of the meadow he turned and lifted a hand; and afterwards his body swung with the long rocking chair canter of his horse and the trail carried him into the timber.

Gurd came around the house. He said to his sister in a teasing, amused voice: "Rakin' up the ashes of an old fire?"

"Hush."

"You two," commented Gurd, "used to be pretty thick. Before Lila came along. I always wondered how thick?"

She straightened against the porch post and showed him a self-contained expression. Gurd laughed a little, seeing his sister close up on him, and ceased to laugh, when he thought of something else. "I don't like the way he's acting. He won't talk to Ben."

"No," said Catherine. "He never will."

"It was something that had to do with Lila and Ben, wasn't it?"

She shook her head. "Never mind, Gurd."

Gurd said irritably: "He came damned near a fight with Ben in War Pass—over Ollie Jacks. He just scraped by a quarrel with Ben last night out on the roundup. It won't do. We've got to stick together. I don't like the way he hangs off. If it was any other man I'd say he was too thick with the thieves. Ben's all right. There's no reason Clay should be so tough about Ben. One of these days they'll wind up in a hell of a battle."

Catherine murmured: "It has been a long while coming."

Gurd cast a speculative glance at her. "You know a lot about Clay."

She showed him that old composed expression again. The quick ruffle of horses' hooves turned her against the porch post and in this attitude she watched Herendeen and Lige White cross the meadow. When they reached the porch Lige White lifted his hat with the gallant flourish he could never escape. Herendeen simply stepped down, saying: "Want to see you, Gurd."

"Come in and eat," said Gurd hospitably.

Herendeen said, "Had my meal already," and stopped by

Catherine. This was when he thought to remove his hat. He dipped his heavy cropped head at her. He pulled his tremendous shoulders together; it was an unconscious gesture that turned him into a solid, huge shape. He said: "Why don't we go into War Pass some night, Catherine, and paint the town?"

"Some night."

He extended a hand and caught the sleeve of her riding habit between his flat balled fingers, rubbing the fabric together; the pressure swayed her a little from the porch post, light as he meant it to be. He said in a thoughtful way: "Pretty," and went on into the house with the other two men.

They sat down in the drowsy shade of the living room. Lige White looked around, chuckling over a sudden fancy. "I remember how your mother used to receive visitors here. A very proper and courteous woman, Gurd."

"Gurd," said Ben Herendeen, blunt and impatient as always, "we're going to set some men on these hill trails at night. Just to see who travels 'em after dark. Lige has agreed to take care of the Antelope Plains. I'm posting one near the west base of the Moguls. I want you to keep some men up there on the high trail to War Pass. Be sure they don't talk and be sure they do this after dark."

"All right," said Gurd. "But you're fishin' with a pretty loose net. What we need is a man to just ride around with his eyes and ears open, without being suspected."

"Range detective," said Lige White.

Herendeen gave both of them a stolid look. "Already got that man."

"Who?" asked Grant.

Herendeen held his answer for a moment, as though he did not quite want to reveal the name. Lige White understood this and spoke with a show of resentment. "Who the hell is running this show, Ben? We're all in it, or we ain't."

Herendeen bent forward and let the man's name drop softly into the room. "Now," he added, "say nothing about it. Anybody knew it was him, his life wouldn't be worth much." He put his hard stare on Gurd Grant. "I don't want Morgan to know, either."

"Well now," answered Gurd Grant with slow discomfort,

"I don't know about that. He's in this too."

"Is he?" said Herendeen.

"Why, of course," said Grant.

"What was he playin' along with Ollie Jacks for? Anybody know where he really stands? Anybody got a square answer out of him? No. Until we do we'll keep this to ourselves." He had a way of dropping his closed fist through the air to drive home his talk; he did it now. Then he added, dryly "It may be he's on the other side of the fence."

"That's a damned fool thing to say," flared up Gurd Grant. "I don't like it."

"He's protecting Hack Breathitt," pointed out Herendeen. "And what's Hack? Figure it out."

"Wait a minute," said Gurd Grant, "Hack's all right."

"He made camp with Pete Borders last night," said Herendeen.

Grant scowled. "Foolish thing to do," he admitted.

Herendeen rose. "You two fellows meet me at my place around six. Maybe I can show you something. Maybe, before long, we'll smoke out Morgan. Far as I'm concerned, it's fish or cut bait. We'll have this country empty of people that don't belong in it by ninety days." He slapped his hand sharply against his knee and rose, leading the other two to the porch.

Catherine remained by the steps. Herendeen paused and put his round blue glance on her, cool and appraising; he betrayed himself to her, in the way he used his eyes. He showed her what he was thinking. "Friday night then, Catherine," he said and went to his horse, riding out of the meadow with Lige White.

"Gurd," reflected Catherine, "be a little careful in what you promise Ben."

Gurd said: "We've all got to stick together," and went back through the house.

Catherine turned into the house, climbing the stairs to her own room. She started to remove the riding habit but stopped and sat on the edge of the bed, closely thinking. All the talk of the men had come through the front room's open window to her—all of it, excepting the name of Herendeen's informer. Herendeen had no idea of including Morgan in his plans. He

had, she realized clearly, a hatred of Morgan that would stay with him as long as he lived and he would try to put Morgan in a bad light—as he had even now suggested to Gurd. She rose, still wearing the riding clothes, and went down the stairs to inspect the kitchen.

Leaving Grant's ranch, Clay Morgan rode north through a gentle up-and-down roll of hills carpeted with bunch grass and loosely studded by twisted, ancient junipers and jack pine. Later in the afternoon he passed the valley of Herendeen's ranch at some distance and entered the footslopes of Mogul, through short ravines shaded by box elder and alder and cottonwood. On this, the west side of Mogul, the land rose step by step to the summit plateau, and as the elevation carried him upward he had his bird's-eye view of the meadows and cross-cut valleys and dusty trails and little lakes and silver-streaked creeks below. In many ways it was an empty land, the few clusters of ranch quarters separated by long distances. Now and then he saw some solitary rider breaking dust on the trails, small-shaped and accenting the surrounding loneliness. This was late fall, with the yellow-blue haze of distant grass and forest fires filtering into the sky; the smell of it was woody and faintly acrid. Westward, beyond Herendeen's valley, the Cache Mountains rose steep and high above the land.

This was his country. He loved it with a hidden intensity few people realized. He was bound to it by the thousand ties of his boyhood. Its spaciousness and its freedom, its smells and colors had formed most of his thinking. In the middle of its burning-hot days he rode with his eyes narrowed but observant to the tawny creases of Mogul's ribs, to the metal flash of the stony soil, to the quiver of heat waves; by night in the black, cool stillness he listened to the far faint sounds of mystery. The land was, though of this he was never conscious, like an organ whose notes, from the faintest cricket murmur to the heavy roll of overhead thunder, played on his feelings. He was governed by its moods as completely as a man could be. Away from it, he was restless and incomplete; in it a feeling of bone-deep comfort returned to him.

Thus he rode upward with the quartering trails of Mogul, toward its plateau in the late afternoon hours. Cattle made



scattered bunches here and there; they rested by the willows growing around the waterholes. He passed one meadow and another where the wild hay had been cut and put up in high, square stacks. This had been a good year, the hay running a ton and a half to the acre. Cowbirds swirled before his horse in black, darting clouds and the smell of the earth was a warm compound of dry-grass scent and the sharp spicy odor of sage and the pungence of dust. The sun fell behind the western mountains in a formless red eruption. In another half hour twilight, cool and tremendously still, whirled about him. Beyond eight o'clock he sighted the glint of light from his ranch house, shining across the flats. Reaching home, he had supper and sat on the porch. Muscular weariness loosened his long frame and the ease of the darkening night got into him; fed and indolent, he swayed the rocker across the loose porch boards and breathed the fragrance of his cigar.

Neither Jump nor Vermilye had returned from roundup. The cook stirred in the kitchen and old Mose was somewhere by the corrals, self-wrapped in his customary gloom. Night blacked out the day and crowded around Morgan until he was thoroughly alone. The rustling song of the crickets swelled along the dark and a small steady breeze, cool with coming winter, brushed him. There were two great hours in life, the hour of first gray morning's light when all things were fresh and sharp and keen, and this hour with its softness and its mystery and its time for reflection. Northward in the sky one great star burned its unwinking white-red light, somehow reminding him of the constancy of all things, the changelessness and the fidelity of the outer world. Man was the only impermanent thing.

These were his thoughts. They were pathways, these thoughts, all leading back to his early manhood and to Lila who had been his wife. He remembered how clear and bright that time was, how much fun it had all been; and then the fun had gone, leaving him almost beyond the power of laughter. The thing he kept remembering was her eyes, black with anger and black with reproach, looking up to him at the last, conveying the thought that their unhappiness had been of his making. She had hated him at the end because of the girlhood he had taken from her, she had hated him for a

marriage she had so soon found wrong. That was always the clearest thing—the memory of her eyes. It had left him with one permanent, impossible wish—that he might live over those days, to swing her heart to him and bring back her first half-wild love of life. Not her love of him, for that, they had soon known, never had existed. He had, too, a gray unforgettable rage toward Ben Herendeen who had made the change in her.

Quietly he smoked his cigar, reliving these old moments, and heard the far rhythm of a horse coming out of the west, around the foot of the Mogul Hills. He took the cigar from his mouth, cupping its glowing tip in his palm, and sat quietly until the rider turned in at the porch. Catherine Grant called quietly, "Clay," and got down.

He rose as she stepped to the porch. He said, "A long ride for you," and caught the fragrance of this girl's hair. It was a familiar fragrance, it took him far back; it revived old things better not revived. But she brought all this with her and stood now before him with her sweetness and her strong spirit touching him, lifting his impulses. The ride had deepened her breathing, it had whipped up her gay, alive temper. She said, near to laughter: "You're not pleased, Clay. I have broken into your sober thoughts."

"How would you know?"

"I know. So well, so very well!" In a small, light and fugitive murmur she added, "Too well."

He brought over another rocker. She sat beside him, lying back. Her arm trailed over the rocker's arm, her face was a round soft-shining blur in the dark. But he didn't need to see it; he remembered how her lips would be long and gently pursed, how half-grave and half-amused her eyes would be. She said in a more serious voice: "Maybe I'm doing something you won't like. I'm carrying tales. Ben and Lige White came over to see Gurd directly after you left. Ben's going to have men out in the hills, looking for rustlers. He's got somebody in the country pussyfooting for him. I don't know who it is—but somebody we're all acquainted with, I think. Gurd wanted to tell you all this. Ben said he didn't trust you."

Morgan said: "Sounds natural."

She let the silence go along quite an interval. Her voice

was cool and near. "You hate him more than people realize, Clay. As he hates you. Nothing ever would bring you together. Is that why you took Ollie Jacks's part?"

"No," he answered.

She didn't press the point. This was the way they had always been, close and tolerant, sometimes angered and frank, but never demanding. She had a silent streak of her own, a depth she never let others see; and she gave him the same respect. She said now: "Do you know why I came?"

He said cheerfully: "To sit on my porch again."

"Clay," she said, almost as a warning, "let's keep away from that."

"Why did you come?" he said obediently.

"To tell you I think Ben would do anything to lay a trap for you. Remember that—always remember that."

He said: "I'll tell you this," and turned slowly in the rocker, hearing other horses sweep around the base of the Mogul Hills. Catherine came to her feet. She murmured: "I don't want to be seen here," and stepped inside the house.

Morgan went to her horse and led it around to the dark side of the house. A single rider rushed at the porch, with other riders pounding more distantly behind him. Clay returned to the porch, watching the first rider's shape break the blackness and circle into the yard. His horse was hard-breathing, pushed by a long run; he said, as he stepped to the ground, "Me, Clay. Me—Hack."

"What's the trouble?"

Hack Breathitt stepped to the porch. He said: "I guess I need a little help on this." He was a thin, agitated shape in the shadows; he was swearing softly to himself, full of anger. He listened to the strengthening rush of the yonder horses. "That will be Herendeen and Lige White and Gurd Grant. It has come to a hell of a pass when a man can't ride these hills as he pleases."

Clay Morgan said, rough and sudden: "If they're stepping on your feet, take a shot at them."

Hack let out a heavy, irritated sigh. "Not yet, Clay. I'm tryin' to be peaceable. Whut should I kill a man for?"

They said no more, for the three ranchers had reached the yard. They were stopped, they were keeping to their saddles,

and letting the silence run; they could see Hack and Morgan on the porch, touched by the outshining lamp light from the living room of the house. These two were side by side on the porch, the thin and restless Hack touching elbows with the long-bodied Morgan. Morgan's shoulders had a high squareness. Every muscle showed the displeasure he felt. It was in the way he stood and waited. He said: "Get down and do your talking."

The three left their saddles, slowly coming into the light. Morgan had his quick sight of their faces, of Gurd's worried expression and of Lige White's embarrassed dislike at what he was now doing, and of Ben Herendeen's bony, flat triumph. "It's what I expected," Herendeen said.

"You're lucky I didn't knock you out of that saddle," grumbled Hack Breathitt.

"If you had nothin' to worry about, why run?" asked Herendeen.

Hack Breathitt was a shrewd man and he had no trust in Ben Herendeen. He said, halfway between outrage and amusement: "Wasn't runnin', Ben. I was just bein' careful. I just kept rememberin' Ollie Jacks."

Herendeen, so huge and so willful, stared at Breathitt with an angered flush of his massive face. Light glinted against his pale eyes. He could have broken Hack Breathitt's back with his two arms, as all of them knew; the desire to do it was ground into the expression around his lips. This was his way—to hate anything in front of him.

Gurd Grant said: "We were coming along the trail down by Dell Lake and saw you and Pete Borders riding together. Pete hit off one way and you went another. All we wanted to know was why you camped with him last night. But you made a run of it."

Breathitt murmured: "Seems like you boys are mighty interested to follow me eight miles on the dead gallop."

Gurd showed some embarrassment. Lige White never said a word. Morgan tried a fresh match on his cigar. That flare brightened everything on the porch momentarily; Herendeen's glance came around to Morgan and then, after the match died, these two were staring at each other, Morgan so dark and cool and Herendeen with all his intolerance in

his eyes. It was a feeling on the porch. It put something into the night and turned the rest of them still.

"Clay," said Herendeen, "you propose to shelter every brush-jumper that comes along?"

"Hack's a friend of mine," stated Morgan, "and he's on my land. I'll stand behind him."

"Maybe then we'd better wait till he gets off your land."

"No," answered Morgan, as insolently calm as Herendeen had been, "it makes no difference where he is. I'll still back him up. Any time, any place."

Gurd Grant spoke quickly, to avoid a break. "We've got no quarrel with Hack, Clay. Not if his campin' with Borders was just accidental."

Clay Morgan still watched Herendeen as he answered Gurd. "Since when has a man got to explain himself to a self-constituted committee?"

Lige White put in his soothing remark. "That's not quite right, Clay. You're puttin' it wrong. You know why we're doing this. It is for your interest, too. For anybody's interest that owns cattle."

"I'll take care of my own interests, without help," said Morgan.

"Don't get your neck bowed like that," complained Gurd. "We all got to stick together."

Morgan threw his cigar far into the yard. He studied the three men before him carefully, and went on talking.

"I guess I better explain. I'll never lift a hand to run anybody out of this country unless I see that fellow stooping over one of my cows. I don't believe in vigilance committees and I don't believe in scaring hell out of some poor two-bit homesteader. This country's big enough for everybody." He turned his attention directly to Herendeen. He was as tall as Herendeen, but slimmer and without the massive bony structure, without the heavy roundness of leg and arm. "And it is too damned small for one man to set himself up as God in tin pants."

Gurd Grant said with a suppressed impatience, "You're wrong, Clay, you're wrong." He turned, walking over the porch, his boots hollowly striking the boards. Morgan heard him stop at the far end. Lige White shook his head, not speak-

ing. But Ben Herendeen's ruddy face was unbreakably tight. "Clay," he said, quieter than he had ever been, "I've taken a couple of remarks from you. I take no more."

"When you leave my land," said Morgan, soft as the wind, "don't come back."

Herendeen said, to Breathitt, "If I ever see you around my country, Hack, I'll open up on you." He swung on his heels and left the porch.

From his place by the doorway, Morgan noticed Gurd Grant swing from the porch end with a strange jerk of his shoulders and cross at once to his horse. He mounted quickly, waiting for Lige White and Herendeen. Darkness covered this yard but Morgan saw Gurd's white and vague and staring face in the heavy shadows. A moment later all three of them trotted from the yard.

As they left, Lige White said something to Grant. Gurd Grant never heard it. In stepping to the end of the porch he had noticed his sister's horse in the farther darkness and at that moment all his long wonder at her relations with Morgan froze into solid certainty—and left him, in that one passing interval, no longer Morgan's friend. For a little while he had the impulse to rush back and face it out with Clay but soon realized he could not betray his sister to these other men. So he rode on, suddenly and violently Clay Morgan's enemy. The change in him was that sudden.

Hack said: "Well, I'll drift along."

"Put up for the night, Hack."

"No," said Hack. "But I'm obliged for the help." He looked down at the floor, involved in his own uncertain thoughts. "It is the last time I'll run from those fellows, Clay. I wanted no shootin'. Now, I don't give a damn."

"Watch it. Don't let Ben push you into the wrong stall."

Hack drew a long breath. "So far," he said, "I ain't done a thing to be ashamed of, Clay. I want you to know that. Well, so-long."

He was soon gone, galloping southward down the narrow valley. Morgan waited until the sound of all these travelers faded into the night before going to the living room. Catherine came from the hallway toward him.

"Clay—did he see my horse?"

"I took it back of the house."

Relief came to her, though there was a shading of worry that wouldn't leave. "Gurd's a little touchy about me. I wouldn't want . . ." She didn't finish that sentence. She showed him a stronger coloring, and covered it up with a quick question. "I heard all the talk. Are you sure you're right, Clay?"

He said: "You think I ought to do it differently?"

"Not if you think you're right." She was a calm, quiet girl. Light set up its rich shining in her copper hair. Her eyes held him and her lips were long and pleasantly firm. She had an effect on him. She colored the room, she put something into it, something like a faint charge of electricity.

He said: "Do what you can to keep Gurd out of it. Ben's going to play hell with a lot of people. If it comes to a showdown I'll have to go against him."

She murmured, "I know," and the color of her eyes turned darker, turned softer. She put her arms across her breasts, holding them together. They were round and firm; her fingers were faintly tanned by all her riding, and long and strong. He had no way of knowing what she thought at this moment—this vigorous and gay and sweet girl; she always had a reserve that held him away. The silence ran on, with its effect piling up. She saw the length of his jaw and the tension around his lips and the smoky excitement rising in his eyes. She said in a small, hurried voice, "Good night, Clay," and went by him. He walked to the porch and waited until she rode around the house. She paused a moment and held out her hand. The pressure of it was strong; and the shock was there again for him. She said, at once cool and near laughter: "Will I see you in town, Clay? There's a dance Friday. I think Ben will be taking me."

"I'll be there," he said.

She went out of the yard in a whirling run. He stood and listened until there was no sound left in the dark night.

## 5 SURPRISE

On Thursday evening just beyond sunset, Ben Herendeen reached the ridge behind the Gale homestead and came over

it so suddenly that he caught the Gale family eating supper under a lone juniper tree in the yard. He might have taken the route straight across Fanolango Desert, but this would have given Gale notice from afar. Liard Connor and Bones McGeen, both being men who liked this kind of business, were with him.

It amused Herendeen to see the complete shock his arrival produced. Gale rose, gaunt and gray-headed and old-faced in the twilight. Mrs. Gale suddenly reached for the smallest child, wrapping her apron around him. There were three other children in the family, a girl near twenty and two younger boys. All of them remained still and for a moment he could see something pretty close to terror in the eyes of Gale's wife. In a way it pleased him to find them still on the ranch. He proposed to make an example of the family and this made it easy. A nester was a nester, deserving nothing.

He said: "You had my warning, Gale."

Gale knew he couldn't fight back; he knew he couldn't argue. He stood with his shoulder-points round and dropped, his arms hanging useless. There was an expression in his eyes at the moment pretty hard to read, black and dismal. He shook his head. "You're a hard man, Mr. Herendeen."

"I gave you time," pointed out Herendeen.

"Time for what?" asked Gale. "To kick a man around like a dog? I ain't hurting you. This ain't near your range. It should be Mr. White's say—and he ain't complained." He didn't speak of his legal right to be here on free Government land, for he knew how hopeless it was in front of a cattleman in cattle country.

"That's enough," said Herendeen. "All you nesters are alike. I give you twenty minutes to clear your junk out of the shack."

Mrs. Gale at once turned and ran for the house, calling over her shoulder, "Gale, help me. Daisy—come help me."

Gale didn't move. He had his head down and he stared at the ground, hard-caught by indecision and futility. The girl, Herendeen observed, was pretty. He stared at her out of interested eyes and was irritated by the judgment he discovered on her face. Suddenly she turned to the shanty. The



two young boys seemed rooted in the dust, silent and soft breathing. The other child, hardly able to walk, moved toward Herendeen's horse; whereupon one of the older boys reached out and caught him.

The women were carrying their possessions out of the house—their kitchen implements, their clothes, their few sticks of furniture. Herendeen said, almost laughing, "Old man, if you expect to save your wagon you better get it out of the shed."

Gale stirred himself. He walked across the yard with his knees never quite straightening. He called to the oldest boy, "Give me a hand, sonny," and both of them seized the tongue of the wagon and backed it from the shed. Afterwards Gale went into the corral for his horses. Herendeen watched the family move around the yard. He looked at his watch, and was a little disappointed that it was so easy. He said: "That's twenty minutes. Set 'em afire."

Bones McGeen rode to the shed. Liard Connor got down and went into the house. Herendeen heard him tramping around the place; the stove crashed down and in a little while smoke began to puff through the door. Connor came back. McGeen had piled some sage wood against the corner of the shed, and now this fire began to burn. Gale stopped harnessing the horses. He put his back against the wagon, watching the fire catch hold. The women came out of the house, but Mrs. Gale moaned something to herself and ran into it again, reappearing with a baby's rocker-bed made of packing boxes. One of its legs got caught in the door and her face was white and cramped and intense as she struggled to clear it.

This shanty was bone-dry. The fire, reaching the walls, began to crack like dynamite caps; the windows were red-shining and the hollow sound of inrushing air grew stronger. Gale turned from the wagon to resume harnessing the horses; he put his back to the burning shanty, stolidly ignoring it, but the rest of the family crept to the juniper tree, watching in morbid silence. Mrs. Gale reached down and caught the youngest child in her arms; the girl put an arm on her mother's shoulder.

One side of the shed turned into a yellow sheet of flame; the doorway of the shanty showed a solid roll of smoke and fire inside—and there was no way now for the Gales to save anything. Herendeen said to his men: "I guess that's all." But he looked at the girl, speculating on her. He said: "I'm not as bad as you'd figure. You want a job? It's one way of keeping your family alive, anyhow."

Gale left the horses and walked to Herendeen. He said: "Mr. Herendeen, my daughter would drop dead before she took anything from you. And if she did take anything I'd kill her. I guess you've done us all the hurt you can. Go on and leave us alone. Someday, maybe I can pay you back."

"Hold on there," said Herendeen. He got off his horse and walked up to Gale, catching the front of Gale's shirt in his fingers. He shook Gale a little but there wasn't any resistance in the older man at all; his body swayed to the pressure of Herendeen's arm. Mrs. Gale's eyes showed a sudden terror. One of the boys reached down to seize a rock; he would have thrown it at Herendeen if the girl hadn't caught his arm.

Herendeen said: "You had better keep your damned mouth shut. Hitch up that team and get out of the country. I don't want to see you on this range again."

He released Gale and returned to his horse. Connor and McGeen joined him, the three of them circling the snapping, twisted rush of fire; flames broke through the shanty's roof and the sky above this area began to glow. Looking back as a matter of caution, Herendeen saw the family still standing by the juniper tree. The girl had taken the youngest child in her arms. Gale had moved over to his wife. His arm was around her; she had thrown her apron across her face and was crying. Herendeen hit his horse with his spurs and settled into a long run across Fanolango Desert. Behind him was the cherry-red glare of burning buildings.

Late Friday afternoon, just as Clay Morgan was ready to leave the ranch for War Pass, Vance Ketchell came into the Long Seven yard and dropped off a tired horse. Vance was a steady-going young man who once had been a puncher for Herendeen's Three Pines and now owned a few cows of his own up on the slope of the Cache Mountains. He didn't say anything for a moment but Morgan saw that he was under

considerable strain—and waited for Vance to make his talk. Vance fashioned a cigarette, lighted it and stood with his feet apart, staring across the narrow valley flats. He said, "Pretty country," but really didn't see it. When he pushed his hat back a mop of hair, black as crow, dropped down on his forehead. He had a blocky, pleasant face at present shadowed by worry.

"Clay," he said at last, "you hear about the Gales?"

"Yes."

"I saw them over in Freeport yesterday. Pretty tough—pretty tough." He smoked on and Morgan knew he had not yet come to his point. Something on the summit of the Mogul Hills seemed to interest Vance Ketchell as he added casually: "I like the family—I like the girl."

"Sure," said Morgan, and understood part of Vance's trouble then. Vance drew a long breath on the cigarette. "It does make me squirm to think of the way Herendeen handled those folks. Whut affair of Herendeen's was it anyhow? If anybody was bein' hurt it was Lige White. Whut I want to know is just how far Herendeen figures to cast his shadow."

"Far as he can," said Morgan.

"Clay, if that can happen to a nester, it can happen to me. I'm pretty small potatoes and it looks like something's afoot to push us out." He stared at Morgan, then said in an idle voice, "I heard the big outfits held a meetin' the other day."

"Wasn't present," said Clay.

He knew what lay in Ketchell's mind. Ketchell was a cow hand at heart but he had his own interests to worry about now, and the affair at the Gale homestead hit pretty close. Ketchell was figuring out the politics of the country, wondering where his, Morgan's, weight would be. Ketchell was too old a hand to ask the direct question, but nevertheless he kept circling around, hunting an answer.

Ketchell said: "I don't think it was right of Herendeen. Can't blame a big outfit for watchin' its own fences, but I ain't so ignorant as I used to be. Small folks have got rights, Clay. There's a lot of them in this world and they got rights."

"If I were Gale," said Morgan, "I'd cut the price of that homestead out of Herendeen's hide."

He saw relief change Ketchell's face completely. Vance

tossed away the cigarette; he was grinning beneath the shadow of his hat brim. "Yeah," he said. "Well, see you in church." He was on the horse and soon away and somewhere in his mind was a decision formed in that little space of time.

Turned townward in the last flare of sunlight, Clay Morgan remembered the worry and the anger in Vance Ketchell's talk. There was a slow change taking place in Vance's head; the same change was going on in Hack Breathitt. It was a symbol of a general discontent spreading through the country. Ketchell and Breathitt were typical riders, born in the saddle and trained to cattle, and loyal to the idea of free range and big outfits. Yet they were men full of rough justice and strong individualism, believing in the policy of Live and Let Live. This was what Herendeen bumped into with his Rule or Ruin ideas and this was what would bring on a war.

Coming down the long grade into the sudden sunless clarity of first evening, he got to thinking of Ketchell's indirect question, and realized he had given a pretty slim answer. The trouble was that he too had been born to the saddle, to cattle and the open range. But if this were so, it was likewise true that he hated pressure from any source, he despised intolerance, he disliked the beating down of little men who had their own rights to the sun. This was why his answer to Ketchell, and to Hack, had been so noncommittal. He had made his little show against Herendeen's force. When it came to the inevitable break where would he stand? He wasn't certain.

He entered War Pass in first darkness, putting up at Gentry's. There would be supper for him at Ann McGarrah's but for some reason that wasn't very clear to him, he went to the Long Grade saloon, found Hack Breathitt, and took him to the hotel for a meal. The town was filling with people from the roundabout hills and from the long deep wastes of the sage desert; wagons and buggies came out of the night and horsemen trotted through town, churning up the silver-yellow dust. Lige White and Mrs. White came into the hotel's hall. Mrs. White turned toward her husband and Clay Morgan saw the momentary girlish lightness on her face when she spoke to Lige. Lige, always a man of courtesy, removed his hat before her and said something and left the hotel. Mrs.

White stood quite still, watching him go; later when she entered the dining room Clay Morgan noticed the old, expressionless calm on her cheeks again.

They had finished eating, but Hack Breathitt remained at the table a little longer, his quick eyes following the waitress around the room. She saw his glance and came over, this Helen Lavalley; but Hack, suddenly embarrassed, murmured, "I guess we didn't want anything else," and left the table. Morgan missed none of this. When they had reached the hallway, Breathitt looked back at the girl, showing excitement in his eyes. He followed Clay to the porch, into the bland sweet-smelling night; and was chuckling to himself.

"See you later, Clay."

"Janet's got a piece to speak, at the school."

"I ain't forgot. I'll be there." He sauntered down the street with his hat shoved back and his boot heels dragging the boardwalk. He was whistling "Zebra Dun."

Clay Morgan remained on the hotel porch, watching this street fill, identifying the horses at the racks. Jesse Rusey cruised by and drawled, "Good evening, Clay," in his even, adamant voice and passed on to the shadows. Gurd Grant entered town with the Crowfoot outfit. Behind them followed Herendeen and Catherine Grant in a rig. Herendeen drove the rig to the hotel porch, handing out Catherine there. He said, "I will see you in half an hour," threw his cool glance at Morgan, and drove away. Catherine came up the steps, laughing at Morgan—and taking the little ruffle of antagonism out of Morgan with that laughter. She wore a long maroon gown whose material rustled as she walked. A lace shawl hid the corners of her bare shoulders and the light of the hotel began to burn against her hair. The dress made her tall, it quickened this girl's deep self-willed beauty. She said: "Will you be there, Clay?" and went into the hotel without waiting for his answer.

He remembered he had not seen Charley Hillhouse as he crossed to McGarrah's store and passed through to the rear living quarters. Ann McGarrah knelt before Janet, adjusting the pleats of Janet's dress. Janet's glance came across Ann McGarrah's head full of relief. "I wondered if you'd be late, Daddy."

Ann McGarrah said: "I'll get you a meal, Clay."

"No," he said, "I didn't want to bother. I ate at the hotel."

She showed him a quick, faintly hurt surprise, but covered it up at once. "We should be starting for the school in a little while."

"Am I taking you to the dance?"

She said: "You hadn't asked."

"So now I'll ask."

She was a small, silent and intense girl who held her feelings away from him. Her eyes remained on him, black and obscure. Then she murmured: "I'll dress," and left the kitchen.

Morgan and Janet passed through the store and sat on the porch steps, watching the crowd roll along the street. Jesse Rusey stood in the shadows near the Mountain House, watching a cluster of punchers near the Long Grade. Gurd Grant appeared at the corner of the courthouse and crossed to the Long Grade. Herendeen came from the adjoining saddleshop and stopped Gurd; then these two talked a moment and recrossed the street, meeting Sheriff Nickum. There was an extended discussion, the sheriff slowly nodding his head, as though he agreed without enthusiasm. Looking back to Rusey, Morgan saw how carefully the marshal observed that scene.

Janet was murmuring to herself, her small red lips moving over the lines of her poem. "Little dancing white-fire creature, light me with your candle." She sighed and cupped her chin between her two hands. Morgan said quietly, "Never be afraid of anything you can't see, Janet."

Ann McGarrah presently came out, dressed in a pearl-white gown; it made her eyes darker, it made her black hair shine by contrast. Standing before her, marveling at the change, he reflected that she was different from the women of this town, different in the way she held herself and in the way she looked out upon the world and pushed it from her. She was always neat and self-sufficient; she had a quietness that sometimes seemed brusque. But she was smiling now at him, pleased by the effect she had created. She saw the reflection of his thoughts on his face and at once the smile died and she looked down and drew back into herself again, because of shyness or embarrassment at the change she had

wrought in him.

The gentle flow of the crowd carried them up the hill to the school. At the door Janet left them. Morgan found two seats near the front of a newly made platform.

Breathitt stood in the rear of the room, crowded between other townsmen. He caught Breathitt's eye but Hack only shook his head, unsmiling and clearly ruffled by something. Solid and still on the hard bench, Morgan had his look at the families around him—the awkward and gentle resignation of the women from the outlying country, the leathered cheeks of the men and the blackness of their hands. This was what sun and rain and work and worry did. Mostly they were people who had few possessions; mostly they struggled to keep the roof dry and the stove warm. They were slow to speak, humble in their beliefs and a thousand miles away from the things Ben Herendeen stood for. He thought about this with a deeper and deeper attention, for the moment forgetting that Ann McGarrah was beside him. She whispered: "It's starting," and he listened to the school's principal make a brief speech of welcome.

Somebody played the piano and a group of first-graders made a ring on the stage, singing as they turned a circle; it wasn't the first-graders Morgan noticed then but a ranch woman across the aisle, mother of one of those children; she bent forward and her hands were tight on her lap and her lips moved, and every thought and every feeling flowed on her face, softening it and making it wistfully pretty. There was applause afterwards but this woman sat back on the bench, closing her eyes; he had never seen that look on a woman's face before.

It went by grades, some singing, some dancing, some reciting. He was nervous, not realizing it. When Janet came forward to the edge of the stage a fine sweat broke across his forehead and he pushed his legs against the floor, trying to remember what the first line of her poem was. Afterwards she made a quick curtsy and her voice came over the room, precise as it always was, and quite sure. When she was through he sat still, not looking around at the other people. Ann, turning to him, said something. She was smiling with that brightness which comes so close to tears. He murmured

"Yes," and was thinking of Lila who would have been happy to have seen this. This was about all he heard of the program, for it was soon over.

Coming up the aisle, jammed together with the other people, hearing women compliment other women on their children, hearing the released and shrill talk of the youngsters, he felt suddenly old and weary, as though he had gone through a fight. He knew the feeling and was a little depressed by it. Ann held his arm. Near the door he saw Catherine Grant. She had been in a corner of the room, standing by Hack Breathitt. She smiled at him and he had the feeling that she read him pretty thoroughly at the moment. The pressure of Ann's hand tightened on his arm. He noticed that she gave Catherine Grant one quick, smileless look; nothing more. A little later they found Janet waiting outside the school. Hack Breathitt came up, grinning from ear to ear. He said, as though he wanted to make an argument out of it, "None of them did as good as you, Janey."

They drifted down the hill, to the corner of the courthouse. Janet went on toward the store, walking with the quick light step characteristic of her. Breathitt had quit smiling and now he watched the street in a way that meant trouble. Morgan said: "What's up, Hack?"

"Nothin'," said Breathitt. "Nothin' at all," and crossed to the Long Grade.

They had already started to dance at the Odd Fellows' Hall. Going toward it, Morgan heard Parr Gentry's voice call the turns above the fiddles and guitars. "Grab your partners, don't be late—swing 'em wide on the big front gate!" They climbed the stairs, coming into the heat and the yellow flare of the hall. The music had stopped but by the time Ann put away her shawl it had started again. They swung away to a waltz tune. She was small and light in his arms, she had no weight. Her hair made a soft dark line at the edge of her temples; a thin-sharp scent of perfume came to him, heightening his awareness of her.

She said, not looking up: "Are you proud of her, Clay?"  
"Certainly."

She said: "I watched you, and saw you tighten up. Just the same way you tighten up in front of Ben Herendeen. What



were you thinking about, Clay?"

"It would have been something swell for Lila to have seen."

She raised her head then. Her lips were almost severe while she watched him; there wasn't any light in her eyes. She murmured: "You never forget, do you?"

Hack Breathitt went directly into the Long Grade and saw a solid line at the bar. Nearest him were a group of Grant's Crowfoot riders, all of them his friends. Billy McQuire said, "Step in here, Hack," but Breathitt shook his head and balanced on his heels, his face cool and smooth and tough. Herendeen's men had gathered at the far end of the bar, and these he watched solemnly. Liard Connor and Bones McGeen were side-by-side at the bar, turned from him, but he knew they had spotted him in the back bar mirror. He pushed up his hat and walked on, making a turn behind these two. There wasn't any space between them, but he came against them and shoved them aside with his shoulders.

He stared straight ahead, into the mirror. Their faces came around to him, with the reserve he had seen many times before in moments of trouble. He knew what the expression meant. The barkeep came down his way, waiting for his choice; Breathitt said gently: "Not now, Sam. When I drink, it'll be in better company."

It was a sound that traveled around him. The talk in the saloon faded a little and he saw, still watching the mirror, men's hats and heads swing. Liard Connor pulled his arm aside. Bones McGeen suddenly grinned over his whisky glass. He spoke to nobody in particular. "Hair in his ears and smoke in his nose. Feelin' the beef in his belly. Whose beef? Now I wonder."

In Hack's voice was the flat melody of a man on edge. "Maybe it was just an accident when you boys bumped into me down by the hotel. Maybe. If there's something in your craw, you don't have to go to that trouble. I can hear English, if you bullheads can talk it. I don't like my feet stepped on. I'll be out on that street all evenin'. Try it again. One at a time, or both together. Or bring along the whole damned bunch, like you did with Ollie Jacks."

He withdrew from the bar and stepped to the door with the solid silence of the crowd following him. He batted the

doors aside with his shoulders. On the walk, he turned quickly toward his horse, which was near Gentry's. He seized his gunbelt from the saddle horn and buckled it around him and pulled the bottom of his coat over it. One hand resting on the horse, he watched the street, knowing that the town was no longer safe for him. None of the Herendeen bunch showed up at the Long Grade door, though he realized they would be moving his way soon enough. Sheriff Nickum came into the light of the hotel. People kept crossing to the Odd Fellows' Hall and the music and the scrape of feet made quite a racket, and suddenly Jesse Rusey slid from the shadows and was before him. He had the soft-footedness of a cat, this marshal, and eyes that could burn through a brick wall. It gave Hack Breathitt a moment's self-affront to think Rusey had come on him thus unawares, but he stood fast, not saying anything. The marshal's hand reached out and hit Hack Breathitt's flank, where the gun was. Afterwards Rusey, no man to ask questions, made a turning circle on his heels, looking the whole street through. He said then, "Be careful, Hack," and stepped back into the shadows. When Hack looked around he saw nothing of the marshal.

## 6 LONG RIDE

Parr Gentry called for a *schottische*. Lige White came over to claim Ann McGarrah, leaving his wife with Clay. They went wheeling and dipping around the floor, Mrs. White very graceful in his arms, and very pretty; but her glance kept following her husband with that calm indrawn attention Morgan had noticed so often. It was as though she did not fully understand Lige, as though she tried to see him off-guard and catch something on his face that he never showed her. Once, when she missed a step she looked up to Clay and smiled, and then she was younger than before, and no longer reserved. She had the bluest eyes of any woman in his memory, so blue that the color startled him.

Herendeen had kept Catherine Grant to himself. After the *schottische* Morgan returned Mrs. White to Lige and stood awhile, idly talking. The stag line thickened. Gurd Grant was

over there and Gurd's glance was directly on him, and stayed on him without recognition. It was pretty clear; Gurd had cut him cold.

Parr Gentry said, "Pick your partners for a waltz," and the fiddles began tuning up again. Clay remained in his tracks, head down, puzzled by Gurd Grant's cut. Something was in the wind. He couldn't catch it with his mind, but he knew Herendeen had somehow gotten at Gurd. He debated it coolly, trying to make up his mind, until he heard Ann say, "What is it, Clay?"

"Nothing," he said. "Nothing at all." Herendeen and Catherine were only a few feet away. Catherine's glance touched him, brief and interested, and then he forgot Gurd and put his hand to Ann McGarrah's elbow and moved her toward Herendeen. It amused him to see Herendeen's ruddy face show instant intolerance. He said to Catherine, "Should be ours, I think," and moved away with her as the waltz began.

Catherine said: "I wondered if you would."

"One more week—one more dance. War Pass, the Burnt Ranch school, the old hall at Chickman Creek. This goes back a long way."

"Do you remember so many of those dances, Clay?"

"Yes," he said, "I guess I do when I'm dancing with you." These dance nights were like markers leading into the back years. He could visualize most of them; he could remember the fun of most of them. "It is an odd thing," he said, and was puzzled by his own sentiment in the matter, "but it seems to be a habit I'm afraid to stop. Like a man that has done one thing so long he can't quit without breaking something that holds him together."

She murmured: "This dance, Clay—with me?"

"Ten years of it," he said. "We were pretty young and all of our friends were young, and we had a fine time. As long as we keep on we've still got something left, of those times. Of everything that used to be. It is a way of keeping yesterday alive, I guess. When we stop, yesterday's dead."

"It will die sometime, Clay."

"I hate to think of it."

They were all around the hall before she spoke. "It isn't the good times you want to remember, Clay. It is one person

you never want to forget. I know. I watched you tonight when Janet spoke. I knew what you were thinking. Not of Janet, not of anything or anybody in that hall. It was Lila, wasn't it?"

"Why, yes," he said, in some surprise. "How would you know that?" Slowly turning with the swing of the waltz, he saw Harry Jump come up the stairs and move through the loitering stags at the edge of the floor. Harry Jump was here when he should have been forty miles out in the Moguls. Morgan wheeled Catherine around, losing Harry Jump, and catching him again. Jump saw him and showed no expression of any kind. It was a signal.

Morgan said: "Maybe you'd like a drink of water."

She had been too long in the country not to know. She slipped her arm through his elbow and they left the floor, passing Harry Jump without giving him notice. They went down the stairs into the soft dark shadows. Harry Jump's boots scuffed the stairs, following. He passed them, saying from the side of his mouth, "Not here, Clay." They followed him as far as Gentry's and stopped before him.

"All right," said Morgan.

"You sure?" said Harry Jump, staring at Catherine.

"I'll go," she said.

"Never mind," said Morgan. "You know better, Harry."

"Well, then. I rode through Government Valley before dark tonight. There's a notice posted on the building. The land office is selling the valley at auction tomorrow afternoon at four o'clock, in Sage City."

He waited for Morgan to speak and when Morgan kept silent, he added: "That notice should have been posted a month before the sale. Somebody's got at somebody to hold off until it was too late for you. It's nine o'clock now. Eighteen hours until four tomorrow. Hundred and ninety miles to go."

Morgan said: "I talked to Fred Rich at the post office a few days ago, and he knew nothing." He drove his hands in his pockets; he had his head up, he was watching the mouth of the Odd Fellows' doorway. But he wasn't seeing it, Catherine realized. He was a long, still shape in the shadows, quietly considering this little treachery. He had a way of

absorbing trouble and punishment without showing emotion; he had a way of storing these things in his mind. He said: "All right, Harry."

He turned back with Catherine. She said: "Speculators, Clay. Or Ben." She knew how he felt about Government Valley.

The music had stopped. Coming up the stairs they saw Herendeen and Ann standing at the edge of the hall, neither one liking the other enough to keep up conversation. Herendeen never bothered to conceal his feelings. He displayed resentment now as they came forward. He ducked his head at Catherine. "My dance," he said, and led her away. Out on the floor he looked thoughtfully toward Morgan.

Ann said: "Don't make me dance with him again."

He said: "I guess I've got to take you home. I'll have to ride."

She got her wrap at once and they went down the stairs. The sense of wasting time pushed Morgan along, making Ann McGarrah walk quite fast. On the store porch he thought to lift his hat. "Tell Janet I'll be back to take her home on Wednesday," he said, and swung away.

For Ann McGarrah the evening went flat as she watched him go; he had not thanked her, he had not even thought of her these last moments, he had not taken her into his confidence and mentioned the trouble that now made him disappear at the head of the street. Still and dark and hurt, she looked down at the smooth front of her dress, knowing that she was pretty and knowing she had, for a moment, warmed his heart. And then this had gone. She thought of Catherine, coolly and critically, and turned into the store. Janet was asleep. Standing over the bed in the dark room, Ann McGarrah watched Janet's small sweetly mature face, seeing there so much of her mother. This was the secure grip Lila held on Clay Morgan—this was Lila's power, this was her way of forever reminding Clay of the past, and this was her way of holding him to an unreal, unjust obligation. Thinking of all this, Ann McGarrah hated Lila with a secret, passionate fullness. She turned back the extra covers from the child and left the room.

Going up Stage Street, Clay Morgan reached Harley Stew-

art's house at the top of the hill. When Stewart came to the door, Morgan said: "Come down to the bank, Harley. I've got to have money inside of fifteen minutes."

Hack Breathitt held himself in the thick shadows by the courthouse corner and saw McGeen and Liard Connor leave the Long Grade saloon. The two of them immediately separated, McGeen turning toward Old Town while Connor traveled to Gentry's stable. More Three Pines riders drifted from the saloon, moving toward the dance hall. Instead of going up the stairs they turned down the black alley between the Odd Fellows' Hall and the adjoining saddle shop. Meanwhile Clay Morgan walked down Stage Street with Harley Stewart, these two going into the bank. A light flashed on. Jesse Rusey appeared from the darkness, at once crossing to the bank and looking through the window. Lige and Mrs. White left the dance hall and passed Hack, on the way to the hotel. Hack heard Lige say in his light, courteous voice: "I'll have a drink or two with the boys, then we'll go home." Presently Lige returned from the hotel, passed the saloon and followed the Burnt Ranch road, disappearing toward Mrs. Benson's house. Hack clucked his tongue in disapproval, saw Morgan come out of the bank, and went at once toward his partner.

"Stayin' around, Clay?"

"No," said Morgan, "I'm riding out." He saw the glitter of Hack's gunbelt buckle. "What's up?"

"Nothin'. Nothin' at all."

"You sure? Anything I can do?"

Breathitt's face showed a long, quick grin. "Not a thing."

Morgan said: "Don't let anybody push you into the wrong stall, Hack," and turned across the street to his horse. Hack watched Morgan lift the saddle leather and haul up the latigo. Morgan stepped into the saddle; he kicked his feet into the stirrups, sat there a moment looking ahead of him, and went out of War Pass at a long-reaching gallop. Hack thought, "I ought to be with him." Liard Connor appeared at the bank corner, exactly opposite the point he had disappeared from a few minutes before; whereupon Hack Breathitt crossed Stage Street, passed the hotel and ducked down an alley. He threshed around the broken boxes and tin cans and bottles behind Shevlin's pool hall, made a wide sweep of this com-

pletely black area and came into the street again near Old Town.

At this same moment McGeen stepped from the shadows of the blacksmith shop. He had his head turned, watching the up-street direction, but whipped around when he heard the strike of Breathitt's boots. The two stood here, face to face with half the street between them. Hack didn't say anything. He held his ground, showing McGeen his swift, malicious grin. McGeen pulled up both hands and caught the lapel of his coat, which was his way of showing Hack he didn't want to draw, and afterwards he rolled up the street toward the saloon. Connor was near the door of the Long Grade; he saw McGeen—and started down to join him.

Breathitt's laughter was a soft bubble in his throat. He crossed the street and circled the blacksmith shop at a short, jumpy run. Behind the Long Grade he heard a man groan; he tripped over a soft shape and went down, his knees planted on the yielding stomach of a drunk. The drunk woke blindly and struck out windmill style with his hands. He caught Hack Breathitt's legs, bringing Breathitt down again; and these two wrestled around the rank smelling barroom sweepings, gritting over broken poker chips and cigar boxes. Breathitt shook himself free and trotted on around the Odd Fellows' building into a small vacant lot adjoining Gentry's saloon. The dance-hall lights fell on the street and, hugging the side of the wall, Hack saw Liard Connor step from Gentry's. Hack was softly laughing again, at Connor's back. He said: "Wrong way," and watched Connor jerk around.

Connor said: "All right—all right." But he wasn't talking to Breathitt. Bones McGeen broke out of the shadows near the bank, and so they had him on the hip. Somebody kicked out a window in the dance hall, the glass splattering around Breathitt. McGeen had quit advancing. Liard Connor, no longer in motion, said, "All right," and dropped his hands.

They had him hipped. Drawing, he had his one single moment's choice—McGeen on his left or Connor in front of him; knowing Connor to be the tougher man, he threw his shot that way. Connor's head flew up and the sound of Hack Breathitt's gun pounded between the walls of the street and was drowned out by Bones McGeen's quick-following fire.

Connor fell on the walk and pulled himself to his knees; his gun had dropped on the walk and now he crawled forward, trying to reach it, and fell again with his arm stretched out full length, fingers touching the gun's butt.

Hack Breathitt felt McGeen's shots breathe by. He snapped an answer across the street, meanwhile plunging past the open mouth of Gentry's toward his horse. The shadows sheltered him and McGeen's shots crushed through the soft wood of the stable wall, wide of their mark. Men's boots pounded down the Odd Fellows' stairway; somewhere a woman screamed. Breathitt was on his horse, racing along the Burnt Ranch road, when, looking back, he saw four Herendeen men rush from the side of the courthouse. McGeen was in front of him, but fading back from Breathitt's fire, into the shallow alleyway beside the bank. Low-bent, Breathitt went by him, pounding the pony with his spurs. There was a short following fire and afterwards, in the safe darkness beyond town, Breathitt's Indian yell sailed up. He was a fugitive then, and knew it; and this was his way of telling them so.

All this had died down when Catherine Grant returned to the hotel to spend the night. Ben Herendeen was in the courthouse with the dead Liard Connor, and half of the Three Pines outfit had stormed away from town on Hack Breathitt's heels. The dance was over. One by one the rigs of the homesteaders and small ranchers wheeled out of War Pass and lights began to die on the street. Standing momentarily on the porch of the Mountain House, she saw Mrs. Lige White waiting in the ladies' sitting room for her husband. Mrs. White sat straight in the chair, hands tightly together in her lap and her eyes fixed strangely and staringly at a wall. Catherine walked through Old Town to the cemetery. All talk and all sound from War Pass reached here only as a gentle wave. The air was soft and cool and the peace of the dead had its way with her. She crouched by Lila Morgan's grave, touching the headstone, and remained this way, long-thinking and wistful. "Lila," she murmured, "if you want him to be happy, let him go."

Morgan took the desert road as soon as he left War Pass, heading northeast into the open flats. Twenty-five miles away the Fort Smith Hills cut a black, cardboard outline against



the pale night sky. His horse was fairly fresh and wanted to go; and so he let it stretch out. He passed a wagon, inbound; along the desert floor at occasional intervals the little lights of the small ranchers winked at him. This night grew cooler and the moon began to throw off a paler shining. By intervals he pulled the big gelding down to a walk, then let it single-foot, then sent it forward again at a long run. An hour out of War Pass found him well into the desert. At eleven o'clock he had reached the Fort Smith Hills and was climbing a canyon grade. At midnight, from a summit point he looked down upon the breaks of the Crooked River, whose rounded peaks and shale pinnacles and bare ravines lay tinged and disheveled in the moonlight. From this elevation he saw one lone light buried in a far pocket, which was the location of Vane Walrad's ranch, and went downgrade into the river canyon. Crooked River, where he forded it, was a shallow clatter of water across gravel. He came upon a cliff at the far side and beat his way along a rising trail, crossed a ridge, and descended to the river again. So, alternating following the river and cutting over high points, he pressed deeper and deeper in this tortured country until at last he felt the gelding slowly give out.

Beyond one in the morning, at the bottom of two high ridges, with the river still flowing between, he sighted a close row of poplar trees beyond the stream. He passed over a swaying cable bridge, the gelding's feet booming up enormous echoes from the planking. Before he saw the house definitely he began calling: "Hello there—hello, Walrad!"

There was a yard behind the poplars and the blurred skeletal outline of corrals and wagons and hayracks, and a house almost hidden by the trees. A door slammed. He passed through the poplars to reach a front porch, and held his seat here until Walrad's voice came at him, sleepy and uncharitable. "Well, who is it?"

"Clay Morgan. I'm riding straight through to Sage City, Vane. My horse is going bad."

"Morgan?" said the man, and was still. Morgan heard a pair of horses stirring in the adjoining corral. One of them softly whinnied, and then the rancher said with a reviving cordiality, "Sure, Clay." Coming off the gelding at once,

Morgan unsaddled and went into the corral. He caught one of the ponies there and threw on his gear. Walrad came up, only saying: "Late for you, Clay." The pony pitched with Morgan and was still. Clay said:

"This road all right? I haven't been over it for ten years."

"Go up the Long Grade when you hit the schoolhouse."

"I'll be back to pick up my horse in two days."

A road—a better road than he had been following—skirted the river. The new horse was light and restless and inclined to spend itself in a hurry and Morgan knew it would be worn out before daylight. The schoolhouse was a blur at the base of the eastern ridge when he reached it; and the Long Grade cut a yellow-rising streak on the side of the ridge. In the bottom of the canyon it was fairly warm, but as he rose with the grade coolness moved increasingly against him. In this heart of night the moon, so round and so pale that it was unreal, stood against a sky cloudlessly black and washed by the powdery glitter of stars. As the grade lifted him in one long, seemingly endless straightaway course against the hillside, the river sank away into the canyon's bottomless black, the rustle of its water sounding like slow wind against trees.

Later the grade leveled out and he put the horse into a run; but this was only for a brief stretch, for the ridge still showed against him and above him, and now the grade began to loop from one switchback to another. The horse settled to a plodding walk. Morgan, checking his restlessness with effort, felt the priceless time slipping by. He had covered about three miles on the grade; and these switchbacks covered another three miles at least. When at last he saw the black shadow give way to the velvet, undulating shine of grasslands ahead, he knew he had lost an hour in the canyon.

He set the pony to a gallop. There was the hulking shadow of a shanty beside the road, its glassless windows speaking of ruin. Somebody camped near it, one horse on picket, and a half-shape rose from blankets as he ran by. Ahead of him, at unknown distance, another barrier of hills showed a low saddle-shaped outline. He rose and fell with the swelling contours of the high grasslands. Moonlight put a silver, phosphorescent glow to the road's dust. Pulling in for a brief

walk, he looked at his watch and found it to be half-past two; one hour later with the moonlight changing and day not far away, he knew his horse was done. Nor could he see the shadow of ranch or house ahead. He let the pony drop to a walk and in this time-eating way covered the next half-hour. The road climbed to a long roll of land, tipped over the crest and point into a shallow meadow, through which a creek ran with a pale glowing. There was a box elder grove here. Coming to the water he let his horse drink; and heard a rustling in the low tree branches. A tall white horse, followed by three others, came out of the covert and stopped to scent the air.

Morgan reached for his rope, gently shaking it loose. He built up a loop, holding it down beside his pony. He kept the pony in the middle of the creek, watching the tall white horse throw up its head and hearing its outblast of suspecting breath. The white horse had started to turn when Morgan gave the loop a whirl and made his throw.

The white horse was on the dead run then, but the touch of rope stopped it at once. Morgan rode out of the water and dismounted, holding the rope's free end. He kept a little tension on the white horse, circled toward the box elders, and made a tie around the nearest tree. The other free horses had bolted into the night.

Morgan walked along the rope slowly, speaking to the horse. He came up against its head, running his hand along the beast's jaw, and down along the neck; rope-wise, it stood still, but he felt the stiffness of its muscles, its waiting dynamite. Afterwards he ran back to his used-up pony, took off the saddle and carried it to the white horse. He slid on the saddle gently, still keeping up his talk. He got the cinch under its belly and put his head against the white horse's side, and waited a moment, and heaved on the latigo and secured it. The tall animal's back feet minced around, it tugged against the rope a little and stood still again.

Morgan returned to his pony and slipped off the bridle. It had stood all this while on dropped reins; with the bridle gone it moved away into the paling shadows. Morgan went back to the white horse, bridled it and rolled up his rope. The white horse wound with him and its back feet began to hit

the ground. Morgan tried for the stirrup, and missed it; he caught the horn, threw the reins over the white horse's head and made his jump. He was barely in the saddle when the white horse fell to pitching.

Morgan hit the horn with the flat of his hand to catch his balance. His right foot missed the flying stirrup. The horse made a half-dozen long forward pitches, kicking out with his back legs. It whirled with him and went high up and came down hard enough to jar Morgan's liver and throw him forward against the horn. Morgan slashed his right toe around, seeking the stirrup, and was carried into the air again. The horse weighed better than eleven hundred and the jar of its landing shook Morgan's teeth and made his nose run. He was half-off the saddle then, grabbing leather, but his next right-footed kick caught the stirrup and, thus braced, he set the horse on its haunches. The animal wheeled, shook itself and started to run.

The Dipper was in the sky and by it he set his course. The scare had left this heavy, hard-mouthed animal, but the bottom was still in it and it swept forward at a long run. Morgan wiped his nose and turned himself a little to ease the pain of his bruised ribs.

This was the first gray morning's twilight, cold and empty. Before him lay the rolling grasslands, bordered in the near distance by mountains in purple-black outline. When he reached the foothills he followed the mark of a cattle trail up a canyon; from the summit of these hills he saw day break bright and cloudless out of the east. He had been partly familiar with the Crooked River country, but this was strange land and he looked down from the ridge into a pocket country covered with pines and crisscrossed gulches. Dropping into it, he began to feel the effects of his ride for the first time. It was, more than anything else, a stiffness in the front muscles of his legs, a hungry emptiness in his stomach.

Ten hours out of War Pass found him threading the pine timber. Here and there a woodcutter's road led away and occasionally he saw cattle grazing. He was considerably higher now, and through one vista he viewed a patch of snow nested against the side of a mountain, at eight o'clock, crossing an upland meadow covered by the shadow of an iron pointed

peak, he came upon a two-forked road, no sign showing.

He stopped the horse to watch the sun and made his guess and took the fork bearing northward. It led him higher by gradual degrees and into heavier timber and brought him by a lake lying lonely and beautiful in its green cup. He stopped to give the horse and himself a drink, and pressed on again, shoving the big beast to a run. The peak was a huge axis around which Morgan slowly turned while the morning passed and the land reached its crest and fell away. The trail came beside the churning, white-watered froth of a river and kept to it for ten miles, thenceforth striking through a dense stand of jack pines. Into this he went, into its sunless aromatic twilight, into its thick silence. Dust whipped strong behind him and the twin ruts of the road kept curving with the falling slope; the running feet of the horse lifted almost no report on a carpet of pine needles made by a hundred years of falling.

At noon the country changed again, the pines dropping behind and a canyon taking him down a rocky draw. Shortly thereafter a desert of scab rock and sage smoky with fall's heat and fall's distant brush fires, unrolled before him. Nowhere did he see a break—either the shape of a ranch, or a town, or a moving object. He had his moment of tremendous disappointment; and then, completely clearing the canyon, he discovered, on his right, a chuck wagon and a half-dozen riders seated around it.

He pulled over at once, but remained in the saddle until the wagon boss said: "Get off and pitch in."

He stepped stiffly from the saddle, found a tin plate and cup at the tail gate of the chuck wagon and helped himself to the pan of short ribs and Dutch-oven bread by the fire. He crouched here, drinking down two hot strong cups of coffee without delay, before touching the solid food. The mark of the long ride was on him and on the big jaded horse, and Morgan knew that the crew, sprawled idly under the sun, saw all this and were making their guesses. A man on the run, they would be thinking. He finished his meal and tapered a cigarette and lay back on the ground, propped up by an elbow. This food hit him like a shot of whisky. It took the heaviness out of his muscles, it made him cheerful. But he

was increasingly pushed by the sense of wasting time. He said: "Which way to Sage City?"

The wagon boss drawled: "There's a trail about five miles yonder. Keep on it. I hear old man Lowry ain't in good health."

Morgan thought about that. The brand on the big white horse was Running L. Maybe that was what the puncher was talking about.

He said: "Never met him. I've been on the trail since last night at nine o'clock, from War Pass. I swapped horses at Crooked River, and roped this one off the grasslands. What I need is a fresh horse for the ride into Sage City. I'll be back this way day after tomorrow."

"Not a bad ride," said the wagon boss idly, and let the silence come on. Morgan dragged the good smoke from his cigarette, waiting for this crew to figure it out. The smoky haze of fall was a blue-gray ceiling over the scab-rock desert; the sun was warm but the smell of winter was in the air, and the coming crispness of winter was in it. This range was three thousand feet higher than the War Pass country.

The wagon boss had made up his mind. He said: "No, not a bad ride at all. Take that strawberry."

Morgan rose at once. His upper legs had gone stiff; he stamped his feet on the ground and limped over to the white horse. He put his gear on the strawberry and hit the saddle and let the horse pitch a little before he hauled it around. "See you day after tomorrow," he said.

The wagon boss nodded. "We'll be here."

Morgan left camp at a steady run. This horse was small and wiry and he had a choppy pace but he seemed tough. Five miles across the unbroken flats he reached the trail and followed it eastward over a land that had no definite horizon. The smoky atmosphere pressed down on emptiness. At one o'clock he fell into a ravine well below the desert line; the road followed it a mile and swung into a wide sink that held a series of corrals and a natural spring. Watering the horse, he rose to the desert level again. At two he was lost in this lonesome sweep of black rock and yellow earth and curling land smoke, pursuing a trail which led constantly eastward without apparent destination; running the straw-

berry, and walking it, and letting it fancy-foot along, and running it.

At three thirty, with eighteen hours of steady riding behind him, he came upon a main break in the road. One fork led into the southeast, the other swung toward the north. It was now within a half hour of the land office deadline; paused at this junction, scanning the forward haze with an anxious eye, he made out no kind of a blur on the horizon. This land ran straight into the cloudy mists, flat as a board. A few fresh prints showed either road; they were alike, these roads, as to the wear and tear of usage, and nothing gave him a hunch except that the northern fork seemed to head more nearly toward the spot where he thought Sage City ought to be.

And so he took it, but two miles later this road brought up before the burnt ruin of a ranch house and a few scraps of metal on the ground. Beyond was only an unused trail.

He wheeled around, backtracked to the junction and followed the other route. Wagon tracks came from the desert and dropped into the road, a wavering wheel-and-hoof pattern coming out of nowhere and leading apparently nowhere. It was then four o'clock and he thought he had lost his race. Twenty minutes later the desert marched to a rim that fell downward three hundred feet into a valley. The road descended a sharp grade. At the bottom of the grade, straddling the silver streak of a shallow river, lay Sage City, its gray housetops and dusty streets making a toy town's pattern from this elevation. He set the tiring pony into its last run, came down the grade and crossed a wooden bridge. He saw the half-empty street, the false-fronted buildings and the once-white spire of a courthouse sitting athwart the far end of the street. When he reached the courthouse and stepped down, a pair of men came out of the doorway.

Morgan said: "Land office in there?"

They nodded. He passed into a shadowed hall, heard voices through a half-closed doorway, and pushed that door before him. There was a man standing by a desk; this man was saying: "Seventy-eight hundred. That's the bid. Another bid, gentlemen? Another bid?"

There were only four other men in the room. One of

them, standing by the room's side-wall with his face turned from Morgan at the moment, was Charley Hillhouse.

Charley Hillhouse said: "Eight thousand," and came about and discovered Morgan.

What Morgan saw on the face of this man who had so long been his friend was the swift thin break of unpleasant surprise. Hillhouse stared, moving gently away from the wall. This was the way he stood during that small interval, with his feet braced apart and his round face very shadowed by his thoughts; and then Hillhouse seemed to close his mind as if something dreaded had at last come to pass with all its unhappy consequences, pulled the surprise from his face, and turned from Morgan. He said again, in a steady, stubborn voice: "Eight thousand."

The other three men were speculators. It was a smell on them. It was written on their good clothes, their white faces and their soft hands. One man said reluctantly, "Eighty-two."

"Eighty-three," said Hillhouse.

Morgan said: "Ninety-three."

Now the speculators looked around and moved together and one of them whispered something and shook his head. The land-office agent looked hopeful. He said: "Ninety-three's the bid."

"Ninety-four," said Charley Hillhouse.

Morgan said: "I didn't ride a hundred and ninety miles to play around with a piker, Charley. Eleven thousand."

"Eleven is the bid," said the land-office agent. "Another bid, gentlemen?"

The speculators said nothing. One of them shook his head. The land-office agent turned to Hillhouse. He said: "Another bid?" Hillhouse put his hands in his pockets, and slowly brought them out. "No," he answered, "that's all. I've got to stick to a limit, and we're past it now."

"Sold at eleven thousand."

Morgan stepped toward the table. "My check all right?"

The land-office agent showed an instant discouragement. "Of course not."

One of the speculators laughed and Hillhouse made a half-turn. "Then my bid of ninety-three is good."

Morgan reached into his pocket. "No," he said, dryly, "I



just wanted to know. I've got the cash."

Hillhouse turned from the room without further talk; the speculators slowly followed. Morgan counted out the money, in bills. He stood over the desk, propping both hands on its edge to hold himself up while the land agent took his name and address and wrote out a receipt.

"You'll get a deed in the next few months."

Morgan said: "When did you mail out notice of that sale?"

The land agent stared at him. "About six weeks ago."

Morgan folded the receipt between his fingers, creasing and re-creasing it, his head bent down. He murmured, "Thanks," and left the room. He passed the speculators in the hall.

Charley Hillhouse waited for him on the porch. Charley had a cigarette lighted. He removed the cigarette, choosing his words very carefully; he had his eyes half closed, and stared ahead of him into the dust-yellow, sun-brightened street.

"I want to tell you this, Clay. When I work for an outfit, I stick by that outfit. I'm foreman of Three Pines and long as I am Three Pines comes first."

"Tell Ben," said Morgan carefully, "that he shouldn't send a small boy to market when he wants something."

Hillhouse pushed the affront aside. He was a cool-headed man, with a loyalty that could narrow his mind. "My limit was ten thousand. It would have been enough if you hadn't come along." He thought about it, and added: "We should of kept that sign down another six hours."

"Charley," said Morgan, "That's the first time I ever heard you nourish a crooked idea."

"Don't get high-minded over a piece of Government land," retorted Hillhouse. "You'd of done the same thing." He gave Morgan a searching glance. "You're figuring I sold you out. Maybe I should have told you the same thing I told Hack Breathitt: I'm your friend, but when it comes to a choice between you and Three Pines I'll stick with my outfit. I'd be a hell of a man if I didn't. Friendship has got nothing to do with business. Well, let's eat and forget it."

This man had been one of his oldest companions. There had been three of them, Hack and Charley and himself. But

as he stood here he knew it was all over. The fine thing that had held them together was gone, the old days and the old times were gone. He knew it, as Hack had known it earlier; and now, watching Charley, he knew Hillhouse, for all his words, knew it too.

"So-long, kid," he said, and went down the street, leading his horse. He left the horse at a stable and went on to the hotel, his knees shaking a little as he climbed the steps. He had a meal in the dining room, went up to a room and rolled into bed. For a moment he lay on his back. He thought of the ride, and he thought of Government Valley, and laughed to himself, the sound of it rubbing the room's stillness. Afterwards, sinking swiftly into sleep, he heard somebody come up the stairs and knock at his door. Hillhouse called through the panel: "Clay, I want to talk to you."

He turned on the bed, mentally saying his good-by to a part of his life that had been mighty fine. He had lost another friend and the bad times were closing in. With that thought he dropped into a drugged, dreamless slumber.

## 7 A WOMAN'S THOUGHTS

Returning from Sage City three days later Clay Morgan came through a low gap of the Burnt Hills and found somebody occupying the deserted homestead house on Salt Meadows. It was twenty-five miles from this point north-westward to his own ranch, and though the shanty was an old one he had not known of nesters being in it. A small spiral of smoke rolled from the tin chimney and when he was halfway down the slope a man came from the house, and walked at a rapid stride toward a small outhouse, slamming its door. This was near noon.

Riding into the yard, Morgan gave his name. "You must be new here. Nobody's tried to make a living on this spot since Yardsley left, four years ago."

The man was around thirty, long and on the lean side, with the freckled skin and dry creased lips and the gray-green eyes of a Southerner. He looked like a worker rather than one of that shiftless rattletrap breed Morgan had so of-

ten seen camping on the edge of the range. He said, "I'm Fox Willing. Been here four months." He was pretty brief with his talk, a reserved man with the mark of a short temper on him, but there was in his eyes at the moment something Morgan had often noticed in other nesters' eyes when they faced cattlemen: a half-concealed hatred, a veiled fear. A woman came to the door, young and still pretty, with pure black hair. She shaded her eyes at Morgan; he saw fear definitely on her face.

It was time to eat; in fact Morgan smelled food in the air. But Willing didn't know much about range etiquette. He simply stood his ground, waiting for Morgan to speak or ride on. Morgan said: "Maybe you could put me up to dinner."

Willing was reluctant. "Sure, Mr. Morgan. Step down."

He watched Morgan leave the saddle and he let Morgan enter the house first. The woman had dropped back and now laid an extra plate at the table. They were, Morgan noticed, in the midst of their meal. One boy, about four years old, sat in an improvised high chair. Morgan took the new place at the table and said to the woman, by way of breaking the ice, "A long ways from anywhere. Mighty lonesome for you, I should judge."

"No," she said in a half-breathless voice, "there's enough to keep busy."

Morgan helped himself to the boiled potatoes and canned tomatoes—and to the meat. It was fried steak and when he saw it he realized it came from one of his own cows. Seeing the man walk so swiftly out to close the shed door, he had suspected it; and this was why he had asked for the meal. He had the hunger of his long ride in him and fell to the food at once, making no fuss about the meat. He said in a thoroughly agreeable voice: "I've seen two sets of families starve on this spot. Hate to see anybody else go through that. What do you propose to raise?"

Willing ate with his eyes downcast; a taciturnity close to sullenness covered him. The woman didn't touch her food. She sat with her arms in her lap, a growing strain on her face. She was about his own age and he could tell she had been though a lot of misery. She answered for Willing. "Anything to get along, Mr. Morgan. We've got three cows for

milk and a brood sow, and I guess some kind of a crop will come up. We'll live, if my husband can find a little work on the ranches." Suddenly he saw the full effect of her eyes. They were begging at him in a way her husband never would see. Then she added, "It's not hard to live, Mr. Morgan, if people try."

It was about the extent of the talk. Morgan appreciated the meal, but he was glad when, hat in hand, he returned to the yard. He walked toward his horse, both the Willings behind him. The shed was only a dozen paces beyond and he had the definite inclination to go over there, open the door, and have a look at the beef for himself. He knew it was there and he didn't want Willing to think Long Seven was run by a fool too blind to see the signs. He rolled up a cigarette, trying to figure out some way of telling Willing this without hurting the woman's feelings. There was a lot in her and she was pretty badly troubled at this minute. Willing was like most nesters. Cattlemen had pushed them around until they figured it wasn't any crime to steal beef when they could. It was just something that grew and got worse on the range. He had to call Willing on this, but he didn't want to make it too tough on the woman.

He lighted his cigarette and stepped into the saddle. There was immediate relief on the nester's face and the woman's shoulders relaxed; they had braced themselves for the worst. Morgan removed his hat, smiling at the woman. "I wish both of you good luck. You'll need it." Then, with the reins half-lifted, he added: "It occurs to me that you may get pinched for grub this winter. If you do, I'll be glad to see that you get a quarter of beef occasionally. When you see any stray cattle of mine up here this winter in the snowdrifts, just drive them back. We'll consider it a fair exchange for the meat. But—" and now he looked at the blank, gray-green eyes of the man—"come to me when you want it. I do not like to think of beef butchered and wasted on the desert."

The tension left Willing's shoulders. The woman's lips softened and her eyes grew warm. After that he crossed the yard and came down at last to the lower edge of Government Valley. Far up the flats he saw the remnant barracks of the old fort, and for a moment he paused to have a look

at this land which now belonged to him.

There was a feeling about this hard to uncover, for he was not a self-analyzing man, never one to dig deeply into the source of his emotions. Facing this range, its good thick layer of fertility and its length and breadth, he came as close to it as he ever would come. It was a strength in his chest and in his muscles. The amber color of the short, nutritious sun-cured grass, sweeping on like a tawny and thick-napped carpet, had a meaning; the round green spots here and there in that tawniness, indicating water, had a meaning. The sunshine pouring down upon it and the shadows creased into occasional ridges, the wild, sweet smell of the land, the stillness, the free sweep, the quick wheel of cowbirds in the foreground and the faint blot of faraway cattle—all this had meaning. Beneath this grass was a generous, fecund earth. A man had to translate this richness into terms of cattle. But it wasn't only cattle. Behind the cattle lay something else. Maybe a sense of personal growth, of pride, of something fought for and won, of large-handedness. It stiffened a man's backbone and made him look at the world differently than other men looked at it. In his world certain things stood out: weather and water and grass and cattle; and himself against all the odds the range put against a lone man.

He had his thoughts. They carried him at once into the past and presently he sent his glance all across the flats to the Lost Hills where, ten years before, he had started his married life with Lila. He remembered that one year vividly, as he remembered everything vividly that had to do with her; and he said to himself, "She should have lived to see this. Maybe it might have made a difference to her."

He slanted across the valley and rode up the narrow length of his older range, reaching home-quarters in the middle of the afternoon. As soon as he left the saddle old Mose gave him the latest news: Hack Breathitt had been pulled into a fight at War Pass, killing Liard Connor. Now Hack was hiding in the hills with Sheriff Nickum on his trail. Somebody had said, Mose added, that Herendeen had sent out a party under McGeen also to hunt Breathitt. Of that, Mose qualified, he wasn't sure, but it sounded in the

nature of the Three Pines beast.

"I'm going to town," decided Morgan at once, "and ought to be back around eight."

Old Mose said: "The way things are now, I wouldn't skylark on the trail after dark. I've lived through a couple of shootin' times and I guess I can smell powder stink as well as any. I smell it now."

Morgan caught up a fresh horse and headed for War Pass, reaching there slightly before six. His first errand was to go into the post office and pay his respects to Fred Rich.

"Fred," he said, "that notice of sale was posted late."

"I took it out myself, the same day it came."

"They mailed it from Sage City last month," said Morgan.

Fred Rich's face showed a whiteness suddenly around the base of his nose. "I guess it got held up somewhere," he murmured. But he met Morgan's glance only for a moment, soon looking down. He had been caught in a lie and knew it. He pushed his hands against the counter, increasingly troubled, increasingly pale.

"I guess it did," said Morgan dryly, and left the post office. He heard Rich call out, "Clay, I want no trouble with you," but he didn't turn, hating to see any man's face show that dead, cheap guilt. The bank was closed and so he climbed the hill to leave the unused part of his money with Harley Stewart and went at once to Ann McGarrah's.

Ann and Janet were eating supper. He sat with them, listening to Janet's cool voice recite the little things that had happened to her, watching the way Ann McGarrah's faint smile came and went away. There was, he thought now, a closeness between those two—created by Ann's affection for the girl. It was the nearest thing to a mother's affection Janet had known; it supplied something a growing girl needed, which he could not give. He was grateful to Ann for it and yet as he watched these two he felt a doubt, though he could not explain its reason.

Ann said: "If you're through, Janet, run out for a minute. I want to talk to your daddy."

Janet left the room. Ann McGarrah sat back in her chair. Her arms were round and firm on the table. She had a way of looking at him, straight and intent, with a shadow across

her eyes. Her lips were red and pleasant; they had a gentle strength. "What is on your mind, Clay?"

"Odds and ends, I guess."

"Did you have luck?"

"I bought the piece. How did you know I was on that business?"

"It was all over town, half an hour after you left." She moved her fingers around the red cloth. "I wish," she said, "you had told me about it that night." She quickly smiled away the reproach. "That was a silly thing to say. You're much like I am. You live inside yourself. Will you be taking Janet home tonight?"

"Yes."

"I wish you'd let her stay another week. She likes it here. She gets a chance to play with her friends, and I think I'm good for her. You're raising her like a boy. She gets your habits and your way of looking at things, your bluntness and your taciturnity. You don't want her to be too much that way, too old and quiet for her age. You want her to be a woman."

"She can come again," said Clay.

Ann gave him a smileless, wise look. "I know. You won't want to give up anything that's yours." She dropped the thought at once, turning to another. "I wish you'd consider this, though. When bad weather comes and you have to board her in town for school let me take her instead of Mrs. Stewart. I'm younger, Clay. I'm more the age Janet's mother would be. I can teach her so much." She pointed to a door leading from the kitchen. "There's her room and her bed and all her things."

He said, quietly, "Let me think about that, Ann."

She said, "I can see you don't agree," and shrugged her shoulders. She waited for him to answer, reading his silence as best she could but not sure of him. He was never a surface man and sometimes she missed the things he thought. Suddenly she changed the subject again. "There's one thing I always fear: your way of looking at Ben Herendeen. It may make you get on the wrong side of things. I hear all the talk, Clay. I know the cattlemen are tightening up against the rustlers and the nesters, and I know you're not with them

yet. Ben Herendeen's at the head of it. That's why you won't join them. But, Clay, why not?"

He said: "Ever see one of these homestead women standing at a shanty doorway?"

"Sympathy, Clay? Will that do any good? Listen. I've grubstaked many a family out of this store. They never come back. They starve out and go. But that's not all of it. Why should you defend Ollie Jacks? Was it important? You knew it wasn't. And now Hack Breathitt is in the hills, and what will you do?"

He said: "I'll stick with Hack, Ann."

"Whatever he does?"

He looked at her. "Whatever Hack does, it will be something Herendeen has made him do. I'll stick with Hack."

"Clay," she said, "do you know where that leads you?" She had a cool head, a smartly logical mind. "You're a man going up. Your name means everything—credit, honesty, work, influence. Hack is a drifter, never anything else. The law is against him now and the cattlemen are against him. Do you want all that against you? Do you want to have all this bitterness on your shoulders? Do you want to ride forever armed and always listening for the crack of some other man's gun?"

He said: "Had I been in town the other night there would have been two men on the ground instead of one." He let the silence drag, and added without any particular tone: "A man has to play his own hand, or he shouldn't bother to buy chips. I'll stick with Hack."

She let out a quick sigh, as though she had been holding her breath. She murmured, "Herendeen—Herendeen. It is always that, with you."

"It may be," he said and rose. He was solid and tall against the lamplight; his cheeks showed the gauntness of recent riding, the blackness of uncut whiskers. He was an unruly man with his own convictions entirely governing him; he was unweakened and untroubled by fine distinctions. At twenty-nine he had the endurance and the stamina and the thorough health of a natural man; and as she looked at him now, so thoughtfully and so critically and so secretly in love, she saw in his eyes that gray-iron shine of hard simplicity. In



fortune or in trouble he would never be much different; he could not be different.

"I guess I owe you a lot, Ann. I'm grateful."

She looked at him, dark and cool and quick. One small gust of that intensity he always felt got out of her: "Gratitude—I hate the word!"

He said, "I'll be back for Janet in a minute," and walked to the store porch. He stood here briefly, watching the street until he discovered Jesse Rusey paused in the shadows at the corner of the hotel—an obscure shape patiently waiting. He crossed to Rusey, observing the marshal's short solid shape swing around to him. Rusey's voice was inflexibly courteous, giving Morgan his due, nothing more and nothing less. "Evenin', Clay."

Children fled from the back alley between hotel and courthouse, racing for a base across the street. One of them cried: "One-two-three—free!" The scurry of these light steps was all around Morgan in the thick warm shadows; the young laughter and the breathless whispering was around him. He said: "Who started the ball Friday night, Jesse?"

The marshal's head tipped. Secret care flowed from him. His voice, when he spoke, was unsentimental and without favor. "They was jiggerin' around from point to point—Breathitt and Connor and Bones McGeen. Breathitt met Connor once, down by Old Town, but neither of them was ready. Connor floated up the street, past the dance hall. McGeen dropped back into the crack by the bank. Hack showed around the corner of the dance hall, and met Connor." He paused, weighing his words with an extreme thoughtfulness. "It was a case of love at first sight, only Breathitt got in the first kiss. Bones was wastin' his shots all the time, just stinkin' up the wind. Hack got out of town two jumps ahead of his own funeral. Tell Hack, if you see him, I'll throw him in the cooler if he does that again. There's a rule against smokin' up this town."

"Tell it to McGeen," said Morgan.

"He's been told," retorted Rusey. "I'd tell it to anybody—even to the Almighty."

A long halloo shrilled through the shadows and a cloud of children raced down the street. Ann McGarrah waited on

the porch, slim against the store lights. Janet, out of breath and softly giggling, trotted toward her. Morgan turned toward these two. Rusey's cautious voice followed.

"There's some numbers turnin' up—maybe one's yours. If I were you I would do no sleepin' in the saddle."

Ann had Janet's small bag. Morgan said, "Time to go," and watched Ann bend down to kiss Janet. There was a good deal of affection between those two and at this exact moment he understood the doubt which had been in him. He was silent and solid in the background, swayed by a resentment he could not control. There was a need in the girl he could not supply, which was a child's love for a mother. Ann was supplying it. But this affection belonged to Lila, not to Ann.

He said again, "Time to go," and watched Ann McGarrah's face show a darkening at his tone. Janet's hand came obediently to him and they strolled up the street. At Gentry's he saddled Janet's horse and boosted her up, and rode from War Pass.

The night was soft and luminous and fragrant. Earth's warmth rose around them but the wind drifting from the south brought in sharp, cool eddies of coming winter. The two of them rode in silence across the rutted desert and took to the steep road up Mogul.

Morgan said: "You did fine, Janet. I guess I was pretty proud, sitting there and listening. Don't ever be afraid of anything ahead of you. Never borrow trouble. Walk right up to it. Listen to the crickets. They've been singing like that a thousand years, and they'll be doing it for another thousand. Nothing changes, honey. Remember that when you feel like running away. Nothing changes and nothing ever really dies."

Sometimes when he talked to her like this he felt the absorbing attention she paid him. Sometimes her mind was away on its own dreams, locking him out—as Lila had locked him out. She spoke suddenly and seriously, as though she hadn't heard him:

"Will you ever marry again, Daddy?"

"Now why should you think of that?"

She said in her small, still voice: "I just wondered. Maybe

I could like another mother." But the tone wasn't like her. It was cautious, it held things away from him. They reached the top of Mogul and sighted the far-shining light of Long Seven. Coolness played increasingly out of the south; the smell of winter lay here. There was something in her mind he couldn't reach, making him realize she was no longer a child. At nine the world had ceased to be all colored and wonderful to her and her thoughts were no longer black and white and utterly faithful to childhood's simplicities; it came as a shock to realize that she would be, from this time on, thinking more and more as a woman thought, sometimes obscure, sometimes with reservations he could not fathom, with always some secret insight he could not share.

Making up a cigarette, he kept his eyes on the house-light, affected by a growing loneliness. A boy would grow along with him, in his pattern; but a girl sooner or later reached the end of the trail and afterwards went along her own. The day would come, he realized, when she would be closer to Ann McGarrah than to him. This was the law of life; he had taken her as far as he could with his knowledge, with such wisdom as he had. Beyond this point she would grow in ways beyond his comprehension.

He said, gently, "A pretty night. Hear that coyote? He smells winter. So do I, but winter doesn't mean the same thing to me as to him. That's the way of it. Not possible for us to know just what the other fellow sees or thinks or feels. We all travel this trail pretty much alone. Makes no difference how many million people have gone ahead of us, it's a new road to you and a new road to me."

From her position at the store's doorway, Ann McGarrah watched Morgan and Janet leave town. A few riders from Rhett's Station were cutting up in the Long Grade and Jesse Rusey stood in the shadows opposite the saloon, taciturnly listening to the racket. The stage to Burnt Ranch was in front of the hotel. A customer entered the store, claiming Ann's attention for a moment; later when she was about to bolt the door for the night she saw the hotel's waitress, Helen Lavalley, come quickly over the dust toward her. The girl had been crying; it disturbed her pretty face, it turned the

flirting sauciness into unpleasant lines.

"What do you suppose they've done to him—to Hack?"

Ann murmured, "Does it matter?"

The girl stared. "If it didn't," she answered sullenly, "why'd I be asking?"

Ann watched the girl carefully. "You won't do what I say," she said coolly, "but if I were you, I'd forget."

"Me?" breathed the girl, suddenly bitter. "I wish I could."

"I guess most women wish they could," retorted Ann, and closed the store. She walked back to her living quarters and stood irresolutely near the center table, irritated by Helen Lavalley's weakness, by its inevitable cause and by the man who was to blame. She felt this way about most men. A lone woman in a man's town, she had too much will to accept their courtesies and their gallantries. Behind their attitudes was always the assumption of greater wisdom and strength which was like acid to her. She hated their code of drink for drink, their unreasoning pride that so often led to bloodshed, their broad horseplay which always seemed to her so close to brutality. She hated the prejudice and ignorance they hid behind their mask of wise gravity. She despised the gallantry by which they were able to soften women to their desires and the easy insincerity that enabled them to leave these women when they were through.

In most things Ann McGarrah was a realist who looked upon War Pass with eyes that were sometimes cruel and almost always without respect. She knew she had a better mind and sharper business judgment than most of the merchants and was contemptuous of them because of it. It was a man's town and a man's country. One thing they respected above all other things—physical courage. Force was the one thing they obeyed, and had she been a man she would have made that knowledge serve her. As a woman, somewhat ruthless in her own fashion, she could only stand back and treat these men with a kind of insolence that delighted and left them humbled, uneasy and glad to be out of her sight.

Of them all, she respected only two men. In Jesse Rusey she felt the same silent, cool contempt for the passing scene, the same gray, pessimistic realism, the same belief in his

own strength. And in Clay Morgan she saw, because she loved him, all that her eyes wanted to see in a man. Turning impatiently, she walked to the room which had been Janet's and stood with her hand supported on the doorsill, watching the small bed and the little kerosene lamp that so delighted Janet. Part of her bitterness now came from knowing she was no different from any other woman. A man—one man—had the power of changing her thoughts and her desires, of making her over if he chose. The weakness which compelled Helen Lavalley, and Mrs. Lige White, and Mrs. Benson, was the same weakness compelling her. Hating it, she could not escape it.

She was thinking at this moment of Clay Morgan with that intense and single-minded absorption characteristic of her; seeing him for what he was, the strong beliefs and attachments she could not touch, and trying to discover in him some unguarded point through which she might walk. Janet, she had long known, was the greatest thing in his life. If she could work through Janet, if she could sway his feelings through Janet . . .

But she was thinking: He must come to me, of his own will. I don't want half of him. He's got to forget Lila. I won't take another woman's leavings. I can't be happy sharing anything with her. I can't crawl to him like a beggar. He's got to forget her.

## 8 THE SEARCH

As soon as he had seen Janet to bed—listening to her prayer and to her sleepy recounting of those happenings in War Pass which she seemed to think important enough to tell him—Morgan returned to the front room and found Harry Jump waiting before the season's first fire on the hearth.

Harry Jump preferred to squat in front of it, rather than to use a chair. He poked a stick of wood at the flame, camp style, squinting at the result. He said: "Now both us and Three Pines has used that valley and their cows are accustomed to usin' the water and grass. I guess we'll have to ride line awhile and throw Herendeen's stuff back."

"Next time I see Charley Hillhouse I'll mention it to him."

Harry Jump said: "Make it clear. I've seen a lot of trouble come up in regards to cows and water."

"There'll be some strays," said Morgan. "Always are. Outside of that, Three Pines will have to stay on its own grass."

"Then I'll ride down in the morning and push 'em off. Grass is grass—and it is ours they're fattenin' on." Jump rose, thin and bowlegged, a hard-looking character at best. His black hair straggled down the back of his neck in flat sections, like the ruffled neck-feathers of a crow; his forehead was narrow and broke off to a long nose and close-set eyes. Standing on his high boot heels he had to bend somewhat to preserve his balance, thus making a pretty poor specimen of manhood; but on a horse he was a different figure entirely. At the door he added as an afterthought, "I was all along the top of Mogul today, just ridin' line. Saw nothin' of friend Breathitt. Awful lot of dust smoke on the trails down by Dell Lake and thataway. Expect I'll be pestered tomorrow by some of those homemade posses."

"Take your Winchester along."

"As such," drawled Harry Jump and left the room.

Morgan stood by the fire, feeling the silence of the house. Janet was asleep upstairs, the crew palavered idly out by the quarters; but there was for him, recurringly, odd moments such as these when he had the sense of missing something or of needing something. He went into the kitchen and poured a cup of coffee from the pot always handy at the back of the stove, and rummaged around for a piece of pie and stood stooped over the kitchen table while he ate. Through the window he heard Cap Vermilye drawling out a story of his youth: "I rode up the trail with Shanghai Pierce one year. This was '72. We were takin' three thousand longhorns from the Texas Gulf to Abilene, Kansas—"

Morgan listened with half an ear, meanwhile thinking of Hack Breathitt. He refilled his coffee cup, standing with his feet apart in the middle of the kitchen; light struck the surface of his eyes, setting up a quick frost-glow. Restlessness turned him out of his tracks and made him gently circle the room. Breathitt, he thought, would be sitting somewhere in the hills, laughing at the posses on his trail and ironically

amused at a world which could turn him into a fugitive overnight. Morgan speculated on Breathitt's possible hideout. The three of them, Breathitt and Hillhouse and himself, had ridden this country for years together and knew every hollow and ravine and windfall pit; he could—Morgan thought—go over the country and just about pick the kind of a spot Hack would choose.

He pulled the coffee-cup from his lips and held it suspended, suddenly struck by a warning. If he were familiar with Hack's ways, so was Hillhouse. If he could pick Breathitt's probable hideouts, so could Charley. And Charley, fast-bound to Three Pines by his hard and narrow loyalty, would be on Hack's trail now.

Morgan turned to the living room, pausing there only long enough to get his hat, his gun and belt, and to lift a Winchester from the rack near the door. He crossed the yard, lugged his saddle gear from the horse barn and roped a pony out of the corral. Cap Vermilye and Harry Jump strolled forward. In these moonshot shadows they watched him thrust the Winchester into its boot beneath the saddle fender and swing aboard. Harry Jump said, gently: "Nice night for ducks."

"I'll be riding around, here and there," explained Morgan. "Don't know when I'll be back."

"Love," mused Vermilye, "is a wonderful thing. I rode ninety miles once to let a gal slap my face. Well, the cure lasted forty years, so I guess it was worth the ride."

"I'll be over in the Cache Mountains tomorrow," said Morgan.

Harry Jump said: "There's a lot of dry wells over there a man can fall into. I've heard of frogs livin' at the bottom of those things for years. But you ain't no frog."

"See you in church," said Morgan, and rode out of the yard. He heard Harry Jump's answer: "Last time I was in church it was for a funeral, so I guess I got a mighty solemn religion. If you see Hack, love and kisses from Long Seven."

When he turned the prow of the Moguls the lights of Long Seven were cut off. The moon was at three-quarter stage and so he traveled through shadows that had the luminous, pearly shine of fog. Mogul's summits were clear-

black against the sky; as he rode over the meadows he saw the blurred shadow of himself go forward in lengthening distortion against the yellow grass. At the jump-off of the meadow lands, where Mogul slid a thousand feet through pine groves into the narrow valley occupied by Herendeen, he paused to take his survey. Dell Lake was a silver circle, half-down the incline. The valley itself, filled with this night's foglike mist, was a winding silver ribbon. He followed its course with his glance, catching the distant glitter of Herendeen's lights, and then his attention came back to the red-yellow glow of a campfire in the pines. Probably a posse.

He dropped into the pines, leaving the strong moonlight behind. Skunk smell, pungent and yet pleasant to a man who lived wholly out-of-doors, lay along the slope; somewhere an antelope heaved out of its thicket and scudded away, creating a little racket in the thickets. This dropping trail fed into other trails, all of them weaving a tangled, mysterious net to a stranger. To him they were familiar and had been since childhood; thus he threaded them without need of thought, gradually quartering toward the campfire until its glow pulsed and shuttered directly ahead.

The floor of the forest was thick with needle droppings; it absorbed the footfalls of his horse completely and so, gently walking the pony, he drifted forward until he reached the margin of light. Here he halted, amused that none of the five men crouched and lying by the fire yet knew of his approach. Charley Hillhouse squatted by the fire, idly feeding in pine branches. Two of the other men were Herendeen riders, one was Hamp Brigham, a smaller rancher from the Cache Mountains; and the fifth, lying full length on the ground, was Gurd Grant.

It was Gurd's presence which troubled him and made him momentarily bitter. One by one Herendeen had pulled his friends away from him, until he could no longer count on the loyalty of any. This was the way of it when cattle country caught the smell of trouble. His father, who long ago had gone through a range war, had said: "When neighbors get to fighting there is no charity. Indian torture is nothing like the meanness of friendships gone sour. I reckon it's a special kind of hate." This was what he faced now.



He heard Gurd Grant say to Hillhouse, "You got a fire big enough to set a signal for the angel Gabriel to shoot at."

"Sall right," Hillhouse answered. "We'll be pullin' out in another hour, but the fire stays and maybe it will keep somebody's mind occupied."

"Where you think you'll find him?"

"Not on this side of the valley. I know Hack pretty well. He likes the Caches better."

Morgan spoke from the protecting shadows. "That's the way I figure it, Charley."

He had a swift sample of what these men would do under strain or surprise. Gurd Grant lunged to his feet and Hamp Brigham and the two men in the background were instantly up, Brigham reaching for his gun. But Charley Hillhouse, cross-legged by the fire, only tilted his head and stared over the point of the flames, watching Morgan drift forward. His face had gone square and hard and his eyes were cool. Charley Hillhouse, the slow and matter-of-fact friend of the old days, was the dangerous one of the group now, nerveless, unrattled and complete master of himself.

He said: "You damned well know better than to walk into a night camp without givin' a shout."

"That was in the old days, Charley," said Morgan softly, "when a man knew who his friends were."

"You know who they are right now," replied Hillhouse.

"That's right," said Morgan. "And I see none here."

Hillhouse closed his mouth, lips cutting a crease against the blocky face. A moment later he dropped his glance to the fire. None of the others spoke. Gurd Grant stood behind Hillhouse, high against the light. Now considering this man who was Catherine's brother, Morgan recognized the pure shine of antagonism in the other's eyes and had his regretting wonder at its cause. He could not ask, for Gurd Grant was his own judge and jury and if this was the way Gurd felt, there was no good in talking. This was the heart and the core of Morgan's philosophy. A man made his own decisions and his own mistakes; he made them and abided by them for good or evil. Just as he, Morgan, wished to have this freedom and this responsibility, so did he give it to Gurd Grant. At twenty-eight any man was old enough to be his

own keeper.

Morgan said: "About Government Valley, Charley. Your beef is still in there. Send somebody over to drift it back."

Hillhouse remained humped over the flame. He didn't look up. "I'll get around to it in time, I guess."

"The time," decided Morgan, at once matching Hillhouse's unfavorable manner, "will be exactly forty-eight hours. If there's Three Pines beef in the valley after that limit I'll run the tallow right off it."

Hillhouse showed Morgan a thoroughly cool face. "You're tough enough, Clay, but you ain't that tough."

"Another item," added Morgan. "I heard you mention something about leaving this fire burning. You're on my range and you're old enough to put out campfires. See that you do so when you leave."

"My boy," said Charley Hillhouse with a smooth, sliding uptake of tone, "just keep right on crowdin' Three Pines and you'll get the fight you're after."

Morgan, under pressure, was a rough-and-tumble fighter. He said promptly, "I suppose that's so, if you can find a big enough army. You boys always did like size."

The remark struck home. It pulled Hillhouse to his feet and it broke the reserve on his face. Facing this one-time friend and knowing him through and through, with all the years of good times in his mind, he made his one last grudging concession. "I'd hate to pull a gun on you, Clay. I hope it never comes to that; but if it does, I will. You nor any man can make me dodge whut I believe is right. I think Three Pines is right, clean through to hell, and I'll go right to hell with it. Don't put your corns where I'll step on 'em."

Zeal burned its pure flame in his eyes. He had an unchangeable and narrow and fire-hot faith. Morgan recognized the hard-and-fast qualities of the man but he could not let the challenge go by. Everything was changing during these moments, his life and Charley's life and everything on this range.

"It'll be sooner than later, kid," he told Hillhouse. "Make it now if you feel like that."

Charley Hillhouse sighed and pulled himself together. "No," he ground out, "I'll wait for that."

"All right," said Morgan carelessly and turned his horse into the nearest downhill trail. The fire faded behind him and the slope soon leveled into the valley floor. There was a road going northward along the base of the Cache Mountains, beside the rattle and murmur of Cache River; this road he followed at a steady run until he caught up the lights of Herendeen's houses in the nearing distance. Turning then, he forded the river at its gravelly shallows and hit a trail rising along the side of the mountains.

He was warmed by a quick and robust anger; it made him a little careless and it made him unforgiving. In his heart was a heavy regret from knowing Charley Hillhouse had cut away all the old ties and taken his stand with such finality. In him too was a puzzled exasperation at Gurd Grant's odd conduct. Yet the time was past when he might go to them and speak reasonably. A man was his own keeper, the judge of last resort of his own conduct.

He thought of this all up the trail, having his small moments of comprehension and sadness, seeing the dark tangle of men's acts with some wisdom and some tolerance. He knew this country, its stubbornness, its quick temper, its self-sufficiency. Long after the quarrel was over men would think back upon their actions and have their regrets; but this they would never admit. It was the way of the land; he could not change it nor could he give ground to them, for if he did give ground he would never survive. Life had trained him to be exactly what he was, as gentle as the gentleness shown him, as brutal as the brutality others brought against him. Men would live as they wanted to live; he could not better their conduct and he passed no judgment upon them. They were exactly what they were, for good and evil, and so was he. The land seasoned them, it toughened them, it warped them, it made some of them strong and wise and tolerant, it made some of them cruel. Each man was his own answer, just as each day in this deep and lonely world was its own answer.

He left it like that, climbing higher on the slope of the Cache Mountains. Somewhere in the singing rhythm of the night, in the drift of the breeze, in the deep rich earth or in the distant shine of the stars, was a meaning no man caught.

Now and then, riding like this in the heart of the night, the faint edge of that meaning softly brushed him, its chill rushing all through his nerves. This was the nearness of it and this was its perpetual distance—strange and wonderful and unsolvable. No man ever caught it; all he had was these mysterious intimations to guide him and humble him.

The slope of the mountain leveled into a small meadow, across which Vance Ketchell's cabin lights winked. Wood smoke lay in curled wisps on the still air. Going forward Morgan called: "Vance—hey, Vance!"

He heard Vance's boots drag over the shanty's floor and paused. There was this cautious interval and the dimming of the light before Vance opened the door. He showed himself vaguely in the doorway and quickly stepped into the yard, his bulk merging with the shadows of the cabin wall. "Who's that?"

"Morgan. Did Hack ride this way?"

Vance delayed his answer. Then he said in a lower voice, "Come closer, Clay."

Morgan went forward until Vance stood at the shoulders of the horse. Vance murmured: "Herendeen's got somebody watchin' me." His talk rubbed the shadows with a softness that didn't carry beyond Morgan. "Hack passed here Friday night. Think he's up in the hills above Freeport."

"Thanks."

Vance said: "You'll bump into Ben's riders along the trail."

Morgan recrossed the clearing. A quarter-mile southward he struck the wide trail leading from War Pass to Freeport and settled into a run. Darkness packed the roundabout trees but at intervals, as he crossed an occasional small mountain meadow or the charred area of an old burn, moonlight showed all things pale and soft. In his mind at the moment was a picture of the section toward which Hack Breathitt had apparently gone, and a fairly definite idea of Hack's possible hideout had occurred to him when the smell of dust brought him out of his thinking; he had pulled the horse to a walk, deep in these quilt-thick shadows of the forest, when a man's voice came from the immediate foreground.

"Wait a minute."

Morgan hauled down. He bent at the hips, lying low enough to see the ears of his horse against the black. Beyond was nothing but a moving blur against the night; there was little danger here, for the man's voice gave away his uncertainty. It was pretty certain he had a gun lifted.

The man said: "Who is it?"

Morgan said, "You go to hell, Bones."

"Oh, Morgan," grumbled Bones McGeen.

"Get out of the trail."

McGeen thought about that, and didn't like it. For he said: "You can go around me, I guess."

Morgan matched insolence with insolence. "I guess not, Bones. Hack saw the color of your tail, and I think I'll see it." He hit his pony with the spurs, driving it forward at a long jump. It carried him against McGeen, his knee jamming McGeen's knee. McGeen's shoulders turned and one arm lifted suddenly—all this was a dull, shapeless scene in the black—and Morgan, bending in the saddle, knocked that swinging arm down with his hand and caught McGeen around the waist. Both horses were milling across the trail. McGeen shouted, "By God—!" His gun's explosion was like a dynamite racket in the settled stillness of the hills. The shot struck somewhere in the high trees. Morgan used his spurs, still holding McGeen. He dragged McGeen out of the saddle as he plunged forward; he carried McGeen like this, McGeen slipping lower and lower in his arms until the man's feet were hitting the ground. Morgan's pony broke into a run, excited by the bumping of McGeen's legs, and at last rushed down the trail at a dead bolt. McGeen strangled up a yell and made a huge effort to get free, which was the moment Morgan let go, dropping McGeen flat. He was a hundred yards away before McGeen tried a shot. The bullet slashed into a pine. Bones's cursing rose to a fever pitch.

Morgan called back, "The ride was free, Bones."

He was pleased with the meeting. It whetted his appetite for trouble, it released some of the rankling anger, and so he ran on with the bending and undulating trail until, from a high ledge of the hills, he saw the lights of Freeport glittering in a canyon below.

There was no foot of this section he didn't know. Now,

making a quick guess, he began to climb through the hills by one narrow trace and another. He came to the head of a gulch, fell into it and rode sightlessly along for a half-mile. A steady current of wind came against his left side, cold as ice-water. At this point he swung the pony and scrambled half up the ridge to a kind of stony shelf. The draught of air poured out of a deep recess here; facing it, Morgan spoke against the night.

"Hack—it's me. Morgan."

He had no answer but he sat there a long while, once repeating the call. There was no smell of smoke and no sound at all except for the cow-like *waunnk* of a bullfrog near by. Presently Morgan dismounted and walked deeper into a natural rock fault, against a steady play of wind. He dropped to his knees and felt the flooring with his hands. There had been a fire here but when he lighted a match he saw that the ashes were old. He had made a bad guess.

He returned to the horse and sat a little while, trying to figure out Breathitt's probable course. This was a good hide-out. If Hack was too restless to hole up here he might be anywhere in the hills. "But," he suddenly thought, "he's probably been into Freeport for grub. Kern Case would know."

He climbed over the ridge and took another trail down-grade until the lights of Freeport showed again. There was a rutted wood road at this point which dropped circuitously off the hills into the end of a narrow street. When he reached this street-end Morgan paused to have a look, turned cautious by the night's events. For he now knew there was no longer any safety in riding alone. Thus had the country changed in the space of a week.

Freeport's street was the bottom of the gulch and its double row of buildings were backed against the rising gulch walls. There wasn't much to the town except a barnlike general store, a frame hotel, a stable and adjoining corral, half a dozen empty buildings to show the town it once had been, a few shanties, and two saloons facing each other across the dust. War Pass, thirty miles away, had drained the vigor out of Freeport and now it stood with its lights shining through dust-fogged windows, darkly crowded by the surrounding hills and living by the grace of the restless riders who cruised

these hills. It had once been young and lusty; at present it was old and shabby and its reputation was poor. Half a dozen horses stood along the racks. Through the saloon doors drifted the diminished sound of voices. A man came from one of the shanties and stood in a short beam of light long enough for Morgan to identify the old nester Gale.

Morgan reached the general store, left his horse and walked into the half-gloom, into the stagnant compound of old store smells. A stove in the middle of the room showed its fire through square isinglass eyes; a man stood bowed over a counter, his lips silently framing words as he read a paper. Morgan's presence pulled him from this chore. He said idly: "Hello, Morgan."

Morgan said: "Shank of a busy evenin', Kern."

Kern Case was huge-bellied and high and round-shouldered from all his weight. He was younger than he looked but he had the moon-shaped ungiving face of a man to whom silence was important. "Thin shank," he said.

They knew each other pretty well, yet there was always a reserve to keep, a roundabout way of talking. Out in the hills were a hundred men who stayed there for the profit of it; in this town now were other men who would fade through rear doors at the sound of swift-coming horses. Kern Case, himself an honest man, held the secrets of these others in his head. They trusted him; and he kept his mouth shut. So when Morgan asked his question it was more like a statement.

"Pretty dark to be chasing through the hills."

"Maybe you went down the wrong canyon," said Case.

"I could ride this country asleep. Maybe I guessed wrong."

"Sometimes," said Kern Case, "a man gets tired of sleepin' on the ground."

"Maybe," agreed Morgan. He turned the remark over in his head; it meant something but he didn't get it. He backed to the stove and warmed himself, gently rubbing the seat of his pants. Kern Case didn't show any change on his face, though his eyes were laughing at Morgan. "You're a long way from the ranch. Ridin' back tonight?"

"Never gave it a thought."

Case started to speak and changed his mind. Somebody came quickly into Freeport, a horse beating out a rhythm

on the dust of the street's far end. Case folded his hands on the table, serenely incommunicative, listening to the horse haul up. Morgan said, "Hell of a lot of traffic for a dead burg," and moved idly toward the door.

"Twenty years ago," said Kern Case, "you'd of got shot for a remark like that."

Paused by the door, Morgan watched the newcomer swing off his horse in front of the hotel. He looked around at Case. "Times change. So do visitors." He stepped into the store, turning to the stove. He wheeled when he reached it, keeping his eyes on the door. The newcomer's steps faded from the street and the silence thickened across the town. Morgan's face was long and still; his lips were flat, their edges pushing together. A flare of light showed in his eyes and he stood straighter than before, he stood balanced and attentive. The newcomer's steps broke the stillness again, heavy and loud and coming rapidly forward. Case stared at Morgan, reading what was to be seen. In a way it was information, for when the storekeeper put his attention to the door and saw Ben Herendeen there he wasn't greatly surprised. Morgan's expression had been in the nature of a warning.

## 9 BITTER HOURS

On the same day Morgan returned from Sage City, Charley Hillhouse had pulled into Three Pines and reported his failure to Herendeen. Both of them had been thoroughly certain of success and Herendeen sat in astonished silence, the back of his neck flushing and his hazel eyes freezing on Hillhouse. Charley felt this bad luck keenly; it was a personal loss to him, so complete was his loyalty to the ranch, so partisan a man he was. He rolled a cigarette, laying his shoulders against a porch post. There was no sweetness in the smoke.

"If we'd kept that damned notice down another twenty-four hours . . ."

Herendeen said: "He was at the dance Friday night. He couldn't of seen it. That's why Harry Jump came to town in such a lather. What'd he pay?"



"Eleven thousand."

"Why didn't you keep on?" said Herendeen, irritably. "Why didn't you snow him under? My God, Charley, I send you two hundred miles for something we had to have, and you buckle up."

"You set the limit," pointed out Hillhouse. "I went to the limit and that's all I could do."

"You should have figured the limit didn't mean a thing against Morgan."

Hillhouse defended himself with blunt warmth. "I'm no mind reader. I can't guess what's in your head, Ben. When you lay out something for me to do, either give me free rein or else be damned sure how you tell me to do it." He threw the cigarette away. "Well, we've lost it."

Herendeen said: "Maybe. Where'd he get that much money? It would be a loan from the bank. Morgan's not that far ahead of the game." He walked the length of the porch and back. He said, evenly: "Now let's see him pay it back."

"What?"

"I don't stand by and lose that valley, Charley. To Morgan or to anybody."

"Whut we going to do about the beef we got over there?"

"Let him fuss about that."

"He'll fuss, all right. You better make up your mind whut to do when he tells us to move out."

"Does it worry you?"

Hillhouse had his pride and his own thorough belief in himself. He showed Herendeen a long, straight stare and spoke his pointed words. "Ben, you can go to hell."

Herendeen's flush increased. His anger, always near the surface, flared out at Hillhouse. It was in his bright, bold eyes an arrogant resentment toward this kind of talk. And yet, as swift as he was to smash down any show of force against him, he reacted strangely to the rebuke, accepting it and saying nothing. These two were in great contrast, Herendeen so willful and dangerously tempered, against the small-figured Hillhouse with his brief speech and his dark reserve. Yet in one respect they were thoroughly alike, unsentimentally weighing all men and all things on the same

scales. Whatever was good for Three Pines was to be accepted; whatever was bad for Three Pines had to be fought.

Herendeen knew this about his foreman, and for this reason tolerated Charley's talk. It secretly amused him to see Charley's friendship for Morgan fade against a loyalty which, once placed, would go to any end.

Hillhouse said: "I know Clay better than you do. You can get along with him, or you can fight him. But you can't straddle. That's why I say you better make up your mind."

"Charley," said Herendeen, "the country ain't big enough for both Morgan and me."

"So it's fight," said Hillhouse, and let the long silence fall while he soberly considered the answer. He sighed a little and shrugged his shoulders. "Been a long time coming."

Herendeen said to Charley: "Stay clear of it if you feel that way."

Hillhouse shook his head. "No," he mused, "a man can't be half of one thing and half of another. He'd be a mighty poor man. I'll do what I got to do. If it means I lift a gun against Clay Morgan I'll do it—and God take pity on me for it." He gave Herendeen a searching glance. "But don't make no mistakes about Clay. When you call his hand you better be ready to go right on with it. What do I say to him when he asks me to move those cows?"

"Let him worry about that."

Hillhouse didn't like the answer and was on the point of saying as much when Herendeen broke in. "Right now we've got Hack Breathitt to find. Take out three-four men and beat up the country around Dell Lake."

Hillhouse hadn't heard about that. He said, "Whut's he done?" When Herendeen told him, he considered it over a long interval. Afterwards his shoulders rose and fell, expressively shaking away a good many memories. "I guess the wild bunch finally got him. Been teeterin' on the edge of crookedness a long while. Well, I'll find him."

Long as he had known Charley Hillhouse, it astonished Herendeen now that his foreman should so calmly accept the dismal chore of hunting down a man who had been one of his deep friends. Long after Hillhouse had lined out across the flats, Herendeen puzzled it around in his head. As for

himself, Herendeen had no scruples to explain away. He was a cattleman protecting his range by whatever means necessary, with an ambition to extend that range by whatever means necessary. A man in this land had rights if he was big enough to hold them; if he wasn't big enough then he had no rights. This was Herendeen's philosophy entirely.

But Hillhouse had in his long cool head a strange standard of right and wrong; and a zeal as passionate as that of a fanatic. This kind of man could do terrible things and feel terrible emotions. He was, Herendeen thought, like a fellow packing a stick of dynamite in his pocket—uncomfortable at times to have around.

This was the extent of Herendeen's thoughts on the matter. Turning to his horse, he lined out through the Haycreek Hills, reaching Crowfoot at suppertime. He stopped here for his meal and later made a little talk on the porch with Gurd and Catherine.

"Charley pulled out this afternoon to round up a few men and scout the west side of the Moguls. We're after Breathitt. I've got Bones McGeen up on the high trail, near Ketchell's."

Gurd said, "I'll go sit in with Charley. Where you going?"  
"Toward Freeport."

Gurd said: "Better be careful. That's a tough district."  
Herendeen let out a huge laugh as he went to his horse. "Gurd," he said, "I never saw the man I was afraid of or the piece of brush I couldn't ride through." Late fall's twilight began to deepen around the yard; it turned the porch gray. From his horse Herendeen watched Catherine, who had said nothing at all. These shadows quenched the shining of her copper-red hair. But she was strong and shapely, the roundness of her upper body having its effect on him. Her face was a pale oval against the dark background; her eyes were very black. When she stirred, arms slowly rising behind her head and changing the shape of her silhouette, Herendeen had his moment's intense desire to get down from the horse. Had Gurd not been there he would have done so. He only said, "See you later," and fell into the Freeport road, never forgetting how she had looked.

As soon as he had gone Catherine said to her brother "You don't mean that, Gurd, Stay out of it. Hack has done

nothing to us."

Gurd walked down the steps. "Never mind. We've got to stick together."

She said: "Do you realize it is Clay's friend you're trying to kill?"

"Then he had better pick better friends."

"You've changed," she said. "What's happened?"

He came back up the steps and stopped before her. "Sure, I've changed." His voice was monotonous and odd. "Morgan had his chance to stick with us and didn't do it. Then let him go to hell. He's not my friend now."

"Listen," she said, "you'd better understand me. There will never be a rider of the Crowfoot outfit sent after Hack, or used to run errands for Herendeen."

He said, "Who's running this outfit?"

"You are, as long as you stick to business. What's the matter with you lately?"

He seized her arm then, his face drawing near enough for her to see distrust on it. "Next time you go over to Morgan's don't bother to come back."

She pulled free of his arm and hit him across the face with her hand. She said, "You're a small little boy, Gurd. Why don't you try to be a man?"

He shouted, "We'll see!" and jumped off the porch. A moment later he raced out of the yard, bound over the Haycreek Hills toward the west flank of the Moguls.

South of Crowfoot the road to Freeport followed a crooked little creek at the base of the Cache Mountains for two or three miles, and subsequently, the valley petering out, took to the tangle of crosshills, rising and falling from one pine-cluttered pocket to another. These were the Potholes, and a part of that extremely rugged section within which Freeport lay.

The clay dust of the road was a ghostly glowing ribbon unrolling between the shadowy timber banks, and as Herendeen traveled he made a perfect target for the rustlers and the fugitives and dispossessed nesters who made camp in the lost hideouts of this section. They hated all cattlemen. He knew this perfectly well and watched the black margins of the road with a sharper attention than usual, but it never

occurred to him to turn back. In this man was a belief, strong as a shield of steel, that no bullet would ever reach him. This belief completely governed Ben Herendeen's life.

The road, rising from the timber, reached a small burn on which the black and gray snags of once living timber showed a stripped gaunt pattern against the swelling moon-glow. Entering this barren spot Ben Herendeen caught the smell of dust, and at once squared his heavy body on the saddle, meanwhile dropping a hand to the butt of his gun. Over by the far margin of the burn he saw a horseman drift into the pearly, diffused light and halt by the road. Herendeen let his horse singlefoot forward and so came upon the waiting shape.

The man said: "Ben?"

Herendeen hauled in. "Nothing wrong with your eyes, Pete."

Pete Borders chuckled. "How could a man miss? You throw a shape big as the side of a barn."

Herendeen said: "Late for you. Or maybe a little early."

Pete Borders said in his easy, amused way: "Just enjoyin' a pretty night."

"I want to talk to you."

"Fire away. I guess we have done some talkin' before."

Herendeen said: "I wouldn't trust you out of sight, Pete, and if I ever caught you with one of my cows I'd hang you higher than a kite."

"Ain't ever caught me, Ben."

"Remember what I'd do if I did," retorted Herendeen. "Do your stealin' in other places and we'll get along. I propose to run every haywire rider out of this country in short order but if you stay clear of me nothin's going to trouble you at all. I can use a fellow like you once in a while." He thought about it, letting the silence settle gently between them. Then he said: "Go up to Government Valley and work over Morgan's stuff. He's too short-handed to watch that end of his range."

"Ben," said Borders indulgently, "you sure make me ashamed for bein' a piker. You're a bigger crook than I ever thought of bein'."

"You grind your coffee in one mill and I'll grind mine in

another," said Herendeen, taking no offense. "I can make it hard for you, or let you alone. Just work along like I said."

"Sure," said Borders. "But keep your riders away from that district at night so I won't be bumpin' into 'em. I got to cross your range."

"All right," agreed Herendeen and ended the interview by putting his horse into a run. Three miles onward he dropped down the head of a gulch into Freeport's street and left his horse before the hotel. He walked over to the Yellow Front saloon, had a drink and a close look at the four or five men around the room, and left the place, knowing that his entrance had sent most of the saloon's crowd out the back way. Traveling up the walk he discovered Morgan's horse and turned into the store at once.

Meanwhile, Pete Borders dropped into the Potholes, swinging through the maze of secret trails and vanishing completely in this tangled country. As he rode he rehearsed the meeting with Herendeen, his swift mind playing upon all that had been said and all that it might mean. He had no illusions, no scruples, no faithfulness to any man or to any cause; he lived by and for himself with a wholehearted completeness; he trusted no living creature. Between Herendeen and himself was an understanding of a sort, but this arrangement, born of self-interest, was a sketchy and dubious liaison that would last only as long as Herendeen found it useful; after that Herendeen would be on his trail.

These things he considered and suddenly, struck by the gray, tricky humor of it, Pete Borders began to laugh, those loud free echoes racing all through the Potholes in bounding waves—as shocking as the scream of an animal.

Morgan stood with his back to the stove, gently rubbing his hands along the seat of his pants. Kern Case, grave and unmoved, murmured: "Evenin', Ben."

For the moment nothing else was said. Herendeen ignored Case, studying Morgan with his round hazel eyes half-shut. He filled the doorway with his heavy legs and high, huge shoulders; he touched the casing of the doorway with his hands. Light deepened the ruddy color of his face and struck up a frost-thin sparkling in his narrowing eyes. The silence was deep and ever-thickening, as though the thoughts of each

of the three men slowly filled and charged it with trouble.

Morgan brought his hands forward, reaching for his tobacco to make up a cigarette. This was the length of the silence. When he struck a match and cupped it to his face he stared over the rim of his fingers, reading Herendeen with a steady interest. The man had swung into the room quickly, as though to surprise somebody; and he stood now with his thoughts pretty much on his face, his glance rummaging all the dark corners of the room. Morgan thought he knew the answer to that. Herendeen had expected to find Breathitt here.

Herendeen abruptly crossed the room, his weight squealing against the worn floorboards, and walked to a rear door. He turned the door's knob gently, he kicked the door open.

Kern Case's voice echoed his dislike. "Get out of there, Ben. That's my room."

Herendeen was in it, moving around slowly; he came out again. Somewhere above them a board snapped, throwing Herendeen's head instantly upward. Herendeen stared at the ceiling and back at Morgan.

"If you're here, he's here."

"You could close that door," murmured Kern Case.

Herendeen stared at Morgan, his lips pressed together. He was faintly smiling, hard and certain and slowly keyed-up by his temper. "He's here," he grunted. He walked on to the front door. He put his back to Morgan, watching the street.

Morgan said: "Keep your eyes open, Ben."

Herendeen didn't turn. He said, "I see nothin' to be afraid of, Clay. As far as you're concerned, I never did." He stepped to the porch and wheeled around, looking upward at the second-story windows of the store. He held the hard-creased smile on his lips; he teetered on the balls of his feet and drew his gun. He fired at the window, breaking the glass, and walked into the doorway again, swinging around to watch the street.

During the last ten minutes men had quickly and quietly drifted out of Freeport until now only a few horses remained at the racks. A rider ran from the saloon, on the heels of the shot-echoes, jumped to his pony and raced away. Herendeen lifted the gun and sighted this man along the barrel

casually and deliberately as though testing his aim. He let the gun drop, wheeled and walked off the porch. Morgan heard him threshing all around the store, along the back wall and down the alleyway to the street again; he came tramping into the room, his bright eyes clouded up.

"Case," he said, "this is a crooked town full of bums. I can make 'em run. There ain't a white man in the place."

Kern Case said: "That windowpane will cost you six bits."

"Charge it on the account."

"What account?"

"My beef account," said Herendeen. "Your friends keep you pretty well supplied, don't they? If I had a couple men to block off this damned joint I'd go through these rattle-trap buildings and drag Breathitt out by the back of the neck. He's here."

Kern Case walked around the counter. He started to speak, but Morgan waved him back. "Maybe," Morgan said to Herendeen.

"Charity and light again," murmured Herendeen. "A crook's a crook, Clay. And a man that plays with crooks is the same."

"Large remark," said Morgan.

Herendeen looked down at the gun in his hand. He reholstered it. His shoulders lifted, tightening the gray cotton shirt he wore. He was high and thick and unbreakable before them—and his eyes laughed at Morgan, hot and insolent and full of memory. "Clay," he said, driving each word across the silence, "this country is full of yellow-bellied quitters. I propose to run 'em out of here. I'd do it alone if they'd stand in front of me instead of slidin' into the brush. For that matter, I'd go into the brush after any man. I'd walk up to him if he held a pair of guns at me and I'd smash the damned things into his teeth. That goes for the crooks and the nesters, and"—he drew his long breath, holding Morgan's attention with his bitter eyes—"it goes for their friends."

Kern Case took a backward step and got behind the counter. He slouched over it, his big hands flattened on the counter's surface. He watched these two.

Morgan said: "You can say it in shorter time, Ben."



This was a quarrel ten years old and never settled. All the old memories were like hot coals deep-buried but ready to burn at the first touch of fresh air. This was a quarrel rooted in their muscles, in their bones, in their nerves. Behind indifference, behind their years of grudging tolerance of each other, back of their smiling and their silence, it had always existed—this detestation, this smoldering antagonism, this brutal chemistry of will and instinct. Herendeen knew it. Morgan knew it. There was reason for all of it, but had there been no reason it still would have existed. They were two organisms destined to fight.

Herendeen lashed his answer back at Morgan. "Maybe I can. You made a statement in War Pass last week. I'll take that up now."

"Take it up," said Morgan, so slurringly soft.

"By God," shouted Herendeen, "I'll drive you out!"

"Ben," said Morgan, "I guess I'd better leave my mark on you as I did once before."

It was acid dropping on an old sore. Herendeen squirmed at the memory; Herendeen's eyes yellowed-up and lost reason. Herendeen's hand brushed the top of his gun—and this was a motion Morgan watched in that cold critical moment, never believing Herendeen would draw. It wouldn't be that quick and final way. It would be as it had been long ago, a drawn-out torture, a slugging, brutal fist-fight to erase Herendeen's malign recollection of that older battle. He was still by the stove, glance pinned to the butt of Herendeen's gun. Immediately afterwards, Herendeen's hand came away from it and Herendeen's boots seemed to crush into the floor as he jumped forward.

Bringing up his arms, Morgan realized he had his own chance to draw—and refused the chance. Coldness and quick running shock stabbed through him, and he knew something gray and dismal about himself then; he knew that this meeting had been a long-awaited, long-wished-for desire in him. He started to move away from the stove as Herendeen's whole bulk swept at him; and stopped to smother Herendeen's fists as they drove in. He knocked the blows aside, no more. Herendeen's onrushing body caught him and drove him against the stove. He slid along the edge of the

stove, falling backward. Herendeen hit the stove. Both of them dropped behind it, Morgan bringing up his knees and beating the wind out of Herendeen's belly. Herendeen sprawled aside. The stove had gone down and the pipe began to fall in disjointed sections, sifting warm soot on them. Rolling half around, Morgan saw Herendeen push himself half erect to come at him; he doubled his legs and shot them out and caught the big man full in the face with the sharp heels of his boots. He rolled again and was up.

Herendeen lifted himself from the floor, dashing a hand across his face to scrub the bright quick blood on his cheeks. Morgan's sharp heels had chopped the flesh of Herendeen's lips; one raw strip hung down, redly swaying over his mouth. The impact momentarily drugged him, it took him off his guard. Morgan moved in. He punched a fist into the wide, hard pit of Herendeen's stomach, watched Herendeen's arms fall, and hit him again in the soft neck flesh. Herendeen's face showed sudden pallor and he swayed a little, windless and shocked. Morgan drove his aimed blows at the huge jaw, hooking his punches up against the long shelving chin. Herendeen dropped his head and Morgan, missing his target, smashed his knuckles on that rocky-hard poll and felt pain knife along his left arm; it was a sudden agony that made him suck in his wind. He caught the dulling of Herendeen's eyes; he had this man half knocked-out—and the old, violent, savage instinct rushed him in until he was at close quarters, trying for the kill.

It was a mistake. Herendeen's great outswEEPing arms caught him in a bear's grip and drew him in, crushing his ribs. Morgan's arms, thus held, could reach nothing; he pulled himself backward, seeking to break the grip, but Herendeen held on, weathering through his punishment, tightening his grip until Morgan felt his skin burn and seem to burst. There was a swollen tightness in his face and neck, his breathing came out of him short and insufficient, each spasm straining his vitals. Herendeen's arms kept tightening, they buried themselves viselike into Morgan's flanks so that Morgan's kidneys sent up a tortured signal.

He was using up his strength against the great weight of this big man, wearing himself down. He fought backward,

seeking to carry Herendeen away from the counter. Herendeen, so huge and heavy, would not move. Morgan lowered his head and rammed it into Herendeen's chin, hearing the roar of that impact through his skull. He pulled one knee behind him and drove it into Herendeen's crotch.

Herendeen cried out and his arms let go and caught Morgan afresh at the front of his shirt and hurled him away, so hard that Morgan's feet left the floor. He struck half-across the room and tripped backward and went down on his shoulder blades. His head cracked the floor and a kind of thunder rolled through his brain, thunder and bright streaks of fire, followed by numbness.

He lay on his side, pushing his arms against the floor but finding no strength in them. He could move them but he had no feeling in them. All this room was gray-black and Herendeen was a blurred shape across the room, slowly trudging forward. He heard Herendeen say something, though he couldn't make out the words. Herendeen, coming nearer, grew taller and broader above him. Herendeen's foot struck him solidly at the base of the spine—and this brutality was a new stream of pain along his nerves. It moved Morgan around on the floor, loosely as though he were a straw dummy. He rolled completely over, coming against a cracker barrel. He was on his hands and knees, looking up with clearing eyes; Herendeen came on very slowly.

Morgan got behind the cracker barrel. He held to its top rim and pulled himself up as Herendeen walked against the cracker barrel. Herendeen swept one fist out, striking air as Morgan jerked back. Herendeen started around the cracker barrel, flat-footed and patient. Morgan, still on the defensive, still weak from his beating, kept circling. Suddenly Herendeen stepped back from the barrel, took a half-dozen side-steps and seized a chair. He whirled it over his head and flung it at Morgan. Morgan dropped behind the cracker barrel and rose again, seeing Herendeen at once rush forward. Herendeen seized the cracker barrel with his hands and swept it aside, diving at Morgan.

They were back in a corner of the store, deep in the harness racks and leather goods and hardware. They were against the shelves, trapped here. Morgan saw the brute pa-

tience, the dull and fixed will on Herendeen's bloody cheeks; he saw Herendeen's head go down, signaling a charge. As for himself, Morgan reached for wind and could not find it; his lungs grew shallower and shallower. Snarled in harness, stepping through fallen boxes, grinding his boots around a capsized keg of nails, he watched Herendeen set himself on his huge legs for a rush and knew he could not take the terrific punishment of being slammed back against the shelves. Herendeen's motions were slower and slower; exhaustion was working on him as well. Morgan saw it and made his gamble on it. Shoving himself forward with his arms folded against his chest, Morgan caught Herendeen as the latter came out of his low crouch and flung him backward.

This last huge wrench of muscles was all he could momentarily manage; it was as if a hole had opened near his heart to gutter away the last of his energy. He stood with his legs wide apart, his arms hung full length and dead-still. Dryness froze his throat so that he could not swallow; his leg muscles were dead and the pit of his stomach set up a steady trembling. Thus spent, he watched Herendeen stoop and seize an ax-handle from the floor. Herendeen lifted it with both hands and stared at it with a kind of exhausted interest, as though he did not quite know what he had.

This was the interval in which Morgan saw, through blurring vision, Herendeen for what he was. Battered and ready to drop, the torn fleshy strip of lip dew-lapped across his mouth and his face and shirt drenched by his own blood, there was nothing left in him except the one oxlike instinct to destroy or be destroyed. It was a fixed, red-shot gleam in his eyes; it was a dull mask on his face.

Morgan knew what Herendeen meant to do before Herendeen's mind had recognized the ax-handle; and now Morgan, looking around him, saw a rack of new Winchesters on the wall. He seized one by the barrel, kicked his way out of the debris of nails and harness and circled Herendeen slowly, the butt of the rifle lifted like a club. Herendeen moved slowly forward, following Morgan's circle. Somewhere, as from a great distance, Morgan heard the rush of horses along the street and a voice calling. But this was a dim sound in the background, drowned by the shuffle and scrape of his

boots and Herendeen's boots as they moved around the floor, and by the lunging, steamy exhaust of their breathing. Herendeen had the ax-handle lifted to his shoulder, like a bat. His head was lowered, Morgan catching only the thin, up-slanted flare of his eyes. They kept circling the room, too exhausted to waste motion in feinting; they circled the capsized stove, the sections of tin pipe rolling around their feet. They drifted into a front corner, and out of it, Herendeen's boots stepping doggedly in the tracks left by Morgan. Outside was a fresher, nearer call: "Hey—Ben—Ben!" Kern Case moved away from his counter and stood by the room's swinging lamp. He held his hand by it, ready to whip out the light; his fleshy face followed these two fighters with a gray, strained fascination.

They were drifting back again to the far corner. Morgan stepped aside from the nails, coming nearer Herendeen, and he moved the butt of his rifle a little. Herendeen made a small sound in his throat and swung the ax-handle in a great sweeping circle at Morgan's head. Morgan jerked back, feeling wind breathe against his face, and brought the butt of the gun full down on that spot where Herendeen's left shoulder joined his neck. The ax-handle dropped. Herendeen's great legs broke at the knees and he fell with his hands protectively before him, the heaviness of his body shaking the whole building. There was the clear crack of a shot on the street and the on-racing pound of a man's feet along the store porch. Kern Case whipped out the light, throwing this room into a solid black.

He was saying in a softly rubbing whisper: "Stay there, Clay. Stay there. Herendeen's crew is in town."

Morgan backed against the hanging harness. He put his shoulders to this flimsy support; the harness gave way and he sat down, still gripping the Winchester by the barrel. He could not draw wind into his lungs; he was starving for air, his heart beat against his ribs and his head was light. He rolled over, sucking wind through his teeth, with his face to the floor; and heard a voice at the doorway, calling into the blackness.

"Who's here?" It was Bones McGeen's voice.

## 10 "YOU WILL LOSE EVERYTHING!"

Kern Case called softly through the blackness, "Keep out of here, Bones."

"I'm comin' in."

Kern Case's voice was a lower and lower murmur. "Make a step and I'll blow your chest out."

Bones yelled into the store, "Ben, you there? Hey, Ben!"

A shot broke along the street again, quick and hard, and other men ran rapidly across the dust. Bones McGeen swung from the door, rushing down the porch. The shots came in regular method; and the Three Pines men were beginning to answer, all the racket boiling up the dead echoes of the town.

Kern Case said, "I hope you've killed the——," and his easy voice laid terrible words on the past and present of Herendeen. "If you ain't I'm like to finish the job. You all right, Clay?"

Clay Morgan said: "Who's shootin'?"

"Breathitt started it. He's up in the hotel. That's what I was going to tell you when Herendeen came in."

Morgan pulled himself from the harness and found his legs snarled in it. He sank back to the floor and rolled clear and stood up. Light flashed red before his eyes, though there was no light in the room. His head ached in long, solid surges of pain, from the base of his skull all around to his nose. He tasted his own salty sweat, his own blood. He drew deeper into his lungs for wind, catching the throb of his ribs. His left fist began to send up its steady racket and he knew then he had broken a knuckle. He could not move the middle finger.

Kern Case said: "That you?"

Herendeen's boots scraped the floor. Morgan bent down, catching Herendeen's shadow, on all fours, against the faint light of the doorway. He saw Herendeen come up and weave toward the door. He said to Case: "No."

Kern Case called: "Stop right there, Ben."

Herendeen moved on toward the door. He was out of it

before Case got around the counter. He was on the street, calling through the spotty racket of the gunfire. "Bones—come here!"

Kern Case swore in the same, passionless voice. "I should of shot the——. Now we're in trouble. He stepped around the floor. He said: "Duck." The front windows clattered down before the sudden veering of gunfire. Slugs struck the store shelves. A can of wet goods, punctured, began to spill out its fluid with a gurgling irregularity. Another slug, striking metal, went *Whannng!*

Morgan crawled across the floor. He flattened himself near the doorway, catching a slanting view of the street-end. His horse, spooked by the firing, had drifted away from the hitching-rack into the farther shadows. Meanwhile he heard Herendeen calling from the Yellow Front saloon. "Get your horses off the street, Jim—" One more bullet struck the shelves. Kern Case said, so smoothly outraged, "I'll have a little slice of this," and walked back through the store. Rolling over to the opposite edge of the doorway, near the counter, Morgan heard Kern Case's fat weight groan up a back set of stairs and across the second floor. From his new position Morgan saw a Three Pines hand lead four horses into an alley. At the moment there was no firing; but, watching the Yellow Front, Morgan caught a flutter of light on its windows and stared steadily at it, not immediately understanding the source of that flash.

Kern Case had reached an upstairs window and now waited for his chance. Somebody ran along the back of the store and came through a rear door. Morgan rolled against the base of the counter, listening to those quick steps advance. He heard Hack Breathitt murmur: "You there, Kern?"

Morgan said: "How you like our little party, kid?"

"Clay? Whut the hell you doin' here?"

Morgan watched the saloon windows grow brighter, though there was no fire inside the saloon. The deep roar of another gun began to plow up the silence on the street. Hack Breathitt came forward to stand at the edge of the doorway. "That's Gale's buffalo gun. Old nester's got lots of spunk. Hey, Morgan, you smell smoke?"

"Fire someplace. See the saloon windows?"

Breathitt hooked his body around the doorway and ducked back again. A bullet breathed through the doorway, landing on the store wall. He said, "The hotel's burnin'."

"Keep your smeller out of sight if you don't want it carried away," warned Morgan.

Kern Case came down the stairs with a fat man's slow haste. He said: "We got to get out of here, Clay."

"Sure," said Hack. "We depart from hence, mighty damned hence."

"You all right, Clay?" said Case.

Breathitt grew interested. "Why wouldn't he be all right?"

"I tripped on a rug," said Morgan. He followed Case and Breathitt through the back quarters. The three of them paused by the back door while Case scouted the roundabout shadows; afterwards they drifted along the building line and paused halfway between the street and the down-bearing timber of the hillside. Light began to brighten at the other end of town; smoke-smell drifted with the wind. Morgan saw his horse in the shadows ahead of him and went over for it. When he came back he heard Case say in his even tone:

"My dad built that store. I was born in it—and all my brothers and sisters. But she'll be nothin' but ashes in two hours from now. There ain't a single way to stop this whole town from goin' up." He let out his sigh. "Well, it was a good store. I'm goin' back to get my mother's rocker."

Breathitt said: "Come on, boys, we'll have some fun."

Kern Case murmured: "They'll be pullin' out pretty soon. Let 'em go." He added in the gentlest tone: "My time will come, Hack, I'll have my fun." He went back to the store.

Gale's gun had stopped booming. Listening, Morgan heard the smelling rumble of the fire and felt the air being sucked around him, toward it. Beyond was the echo of a voice and he thought he heard horses running in the distance. Breathitt said: "They'll be headin' home." Light stained the shadows and Breathitt, facing Morgan, suddenly put his face quite close to him. "My God, you been shavin' with a hammer?"

"Rug had spikes on it," said Morgan. Kern Case came back, out of breath, bearing his rocking chair. He sat down in it, teetering it back and forth.

Morgan said: "Let's go."



"No," said Case, "I guess I'll stick around."

"Good idea," said Breathitt. "Maybe we can roast a steak when it gets warmer. What you doing over this way, Clay?"

Clay got stiffly on his horse. "Where'll you be, Hack?"

"In the Potholes. Around the scrub-oak spring."

"Better come back to Long Seven," said Morgan. "Herendeen won't get off your trail now, Hack. You've got no business fooling around here."

Light broke the shadows. He saw Hack's face set in its restless half-smile and realized his partner found a malicious satisfaction in this chase. That was Breathitt's way. He had a wild kink in him and he was tough enough to run his luck out to the bitter end. Hack murmured: "Later, maybe."

Morgan said, "Get out of this light. If you bump into trouble, kid, you know where to come."

Hack raised his head. He said, "That's whut you came down here to say, wasn't it?" He was no longer smiling. His face was in the shadows, his voice was grave and troubled. "I guess I have brought a hell of a lot of trouble down on my friends. I'll remember it, Clay. If I don't see you again soon I want you to know—" This was as far as he got. He shrugged his shoulders, only adding, "So-long."

Morgan turned up the trail, winding with the steep grade until he had reached the last high point before going into solid timber. From this elevation he looked down on the white-red tangle of high leaping flames. The roof and sides of the hotel were eaten away and what he saw now was the inside skeleton of the building penciled darkly against the swirling fire. One wall of the store had caught. All the surrounding gulch was day-bright and he made out Gale and Gale's family slowly crossing the head of the gulch, toward the Potholes. Herendeen, apparently, had gone. Some of the adjacent trees began to catch, fire licking up the resinous trunks and exploding in the dry branches.

It was beyond midnight when he reached home. Harry Jump, nighthawking around the yard, followed him into the kitchen and watched him strip down to the waist and wash. Morgan's cheeks showed the battering of Herendeen's fists. There was a long welt on his right flank which astonished him, for he could not remember how it had happened. Be-

hind his right ear was a hole an inch long and cut to the bone; his knuckles were slashed. His middle left finger was broken.

"No," said Harry Jump, taking up where he had left off some hours before, "I guess it wouldn't be love. Funny I didn't hear any dynamite explosion tonight."

"Met a man," answered Morgan.

"You took a gun along," pointed out Harry Jump.

"Not for this man," answered Morgan. "We resumed an argument of long duration. Didn't finish it last time."

"And you ain't finished it this time either," opined Harry Jump, "if he's still alive."

Morgan went up to his bed and lay there, his brain pulsing within its skullcap and strong pain traveling through his left arm from the broken finger. It made him remember the older fight. Both of them had been younger men, soon recovering from the misery of that beating. This one would stick, it would be buried physically in them as long as they lived, and the sting of it would never leave their minds.

He knew now that he would never be able to ride through the country in the old free-and-easy style. Herendeen's face and eyes, near the end of the fight, had shown him a purpose that would not die. Even in the last stages of exhaustion, when Herendeen was on the edge of dropping, that resistless thing carried him on. Other events too had changed the country. The flames of Freeport made a kind of signal, and Gale's buffalo gun, howling against the Three Pines men, was a signal. Charley Hillhouse was in the hills hunting Breathitt—and Breathitt, with that bitter half-smile on his face, would not run away.

Herendeen had done this by his fixed rule or ruin policy. The nesters and the stray crooks in the Potholes, and all the little ranchers, would be making up their minds. Gurd Grant and Lige White, and maybe a few smaller cattlemen, had to go with Herendeen—they could do nothing else now. It was like the fire at Freeport. Once started nothing could stop it.

He pushed his palm across his eyes, sleepless and aching and hard-pressed, slowly thinking his way through the puzzle. He was in the middle of this, high and dry between Herendeen and the other side; "the other side" was the crooks,

for whom he had no sympathy. But "the other side," also, was the little men, like Gale and Vance Ketchell and Hack, and the nester family back on Salt Meadow. Lying here, he saw his own range clearly. He had spent his ten years building it, he was a rancher in the class with Herendeen and if he fought Herendeen now it meant that he stood to lose all that he had. For he knew Herendeen's strength, and he knew the ways by which Herendeen could clean him out. They were ways as old as cattle land was.

At two in the morning, his broken hand on fire, he dressed and went downstairs; he lighted a lamp in the kitchen and shaved himself for want of something better to do—watching the bruised patches on his face slowly change color. He stoked up the stove and put on the coffeepot; and sat on the porch in the moon-shot heart of night. Wind drifted across the flats, cold and sweet. Harry Jump appeared from the shadows, saying in his sleepy, irritable voice, "Well, if you're goin' to stay up I'll turn in."

Morgan got up from the chair, unable to take the punishment of his hand by sitting still. He went in and drank his coffee, black and hot, and returned to the yard, pacing out through the long-thrown shadows of the poplars. The weathered juniper poles of the corral showed whitely in the moonlight; across the valley the outline of the hills was very clear. There was nothing to break the silence; even the night creatures at last grew still. And so he watched this land, his land, slowly turn through the night from glowing shapelessness to the first hard shadows of false morning. A streak showed over the eastern hills and the horses began to stir in the corral. At four he heard the cook cross the kitchen, asthmatically coughing; at five, drawn and wire-nerved, Morgan ate breakfast with the crew.

He said to Jump, "I'll be in town for a couple hours. Stick close to the house until I get back."

Afterwards, all his muscles sore and strained and ragged, he climbed the stairs to Janet's room and stood a moment by her bed. She lay in a curled bundle, both hands drawn near her face. Her lips were soft, almost on the edge of a smile, as though her dreams were pleasant; and this way, unconscious of him, she showed Morgan a childish sweetness that

held him there, long-wondering and strongly moved. It was that little-girl look, full of faith and belief, which struck him so hard. It would not, he realized, be with her much longer. He left the room reluctantly, got his horse and lined out for War Pass, reaching town beyond sunup and going directly to Charley Padden's house.

Charley was the only doctor in the country, a man turned rough and blunt by the kind of practice he had, somewhat profane and apparently calloused to pain in others. When he saw the broken finger and the bruises on Morgan's face, he said: "The other customer came in before daylight. I took four stitches in his lip. This is going to make you squirm, Clay. Want a drink of whisky first?"

"No," said Clay, "go ahead and don't talk so much."

Half an hour later he left Charley Padden's with his hand splinted and wound in tape, leading his horse. He stood a moment at the corner of the post office, dragging in the smoke of a cigarette Padden had rolled for him. He was damp and cold with his own sweat and his lips were narrowed down at the corners. Parr Gentry was, at the moment, opening up the stable doors; a roustabout swept the sawdust and debris of the previous night's play out of the Long Grade. On the edge of riding back to the ranch, he saw Ann McGarrah come to the door of her store. He turned that way.

Her eyes, so large and so dark, went over him swiftly, seeing the damage of the fight. The story was on him and she was wise enough to draw her own conclusions. She showed no sympathy and she said nothing but she put her hand to his elbow and drew him into the store. She had her back to him for a moment. When she turned, facing him again, he noticed the dramatic change in her eyes. They were black, they were alive with old, deep feeling. She touched his chest swiftly and lightly and afterwards jerked both hands behind her, as if startled by that impulsive act.

"Clay," she said, "the Burnt Ranch stage came through here an hour ago. I know what has happened."

"You're up early. And you look fresh enough to kiss."

She spoke, half in anger and half in appeal. "Don't say that to me. Not like that. Not so—not so easy and so casual. Like a whisky drummer chucking a waitress under the chin."

He was weary to the bone and his nerves had him edgy. He had never spoken a sharp word to her but he came close to it now. He held it back until his voice was severe. "I made a pretty general statement, not poorly meant. You don't need to fly at me for it. I've observed you carry a chip on your shoulder toward most men. If you think it necessary to do that to me I won't trouble you again."

Her breath fell out of her in a small gasp. Completely puzzled, he saw her eyes show tears. She said: "Clay—I didn't mean it that way! Do you have to be brutal?"

"It has been difficult for me to know what you do mean, most anytime. You never let a man see inside. There is such a thing as being too proud, Ann, and there's no use despisin' the world because you don't like the way it is made. You could have this town eatin' out of your hand, if you wanted."

She said: "I don't want this town, or anybody in it."

"That's what I mean," he told her quietly. "I guess it is because you've got to have things too perfect—and what you see around here isn't like that."

She bowed her head, shutting away his sight of her face. Her shoulders were small and pulled together. "Is that what you have thought all this time, then? That I won't smile at things I hate? That I won't praise things that are cheap and second-rate? Is that the reason?"

He was still puzzled. "Reason for what?"

"Never mind. I know what is inside me, Clay. If I don't show those things to everybody in town, as I'd show goods on a counter, it is because I can't." She looked at him with a strange, dark intensity; she seemed to be waiting for him to understand. "Good things and real things don't come often, Clay. They are worth waiting for, I think. And if they never come, how could anybody be content with only half of what they dreamed?"

He said in a kinder voice: "I guess it is a question of what you want."

"Yes," she murmured, "that's it. To have something you want—all of it—or nothing." She didn't meet his eyes at the moment. She turned away, her hands running the edges of the store's counter. She said: "Clay—don't go on as you are. Don't fight Herendeen. You will lose everything."

He said, with a dry amusement: "Maybe it is as you say, Ann, with me, too. I want something, nothing else will do."

She came around quickly, her voice anxiously sharp. "What do you want, Clay?"

But he shook his head, more and more amused by his own uncertainty. "I don't know, Ann. I don't know." He smiled at her, saying in a rare, teasing tone: "What were we arguing about? That you were pretty enough to kiss. Someday a man will—and maybe you'll forget to push him back."

She was in the corner of the room now, her face shaded and her voice tonelessly low. "Maybe," she answered.

He left the store, reached his horse and rode from War Pass. This time, instead of taking the desert route, he kept on with the Burnt Ranch road, passing into the pines and curving along the narrow-walled canyon whose creek boiled shallow and noisy beside him. Day brightened overhead but the heat was no longer in the sun and all things lay still and clear and fresh before him. At the head of Herendeen's valley, four miles from town, he swung into the Dell Lake trail and quartered up the slope of Mogul, intending thus to cut his range on the west side. Beyond the lake, he veered aside to have a look at the campfire made by Hillhouse the night before and noticed that it had been carefully put out. Hillhouse had not left it burning. Satisfied, he entered the pines, constantly climbing. At the first bench he let the horse breathe, by Stark's line cabin, and pushed on. Rounding the bend of the trail, a few minutes later, he saw Catherine Grant dismounted in the trail, waiting.

## 11 THE INEVITABLE PAST

When Morgan dismounted before Catherine her eyes showed him something that warmed him through and through: it was a swift personal interest, a little saddened by what she saw, as though his injuries hurt her heart. "Bones McGeen came by the ranch late last night and told us what happened." She watched him quite closely, one strong line of worry across her forehead. "I was afraid you were badly hurt. I hope you paid him back. I hope you

smashed the lights out of him!"

He managed a grin. "He'll take no beauty prizes for a spell."

"If I'd been there I would have shot him, Clay. I swear I would." Then her smooth, strong face lighted and she answered his smile. "You're a tough brute. It's good to know."

They had this power to be pleased with each other, to cover up seriousness with a light, touch-and-go humor. Always when they met, something got into the day that had not been there before; something changed them both, lifting them from the slow and customary channel of their thoughts and their habits. He said, "Sit down," and settled himself at the base of a tree. She dropped near him, in front of him, her legs half-folded beneath her symmetrical upper body, her hands gently touching the earth. He liked to watch her hands; they were long and square, with fingers that had grace in the way they gently turned. For a while he forgot the throb of his knuckles and the swollen stiffness of his cheeks; he was aware of her presence and its effect on him. The day was better and some of the trouble went out of his head.

He said: "Glad I crossed your trail. What are you doing?"

"I was coming your way. I wanted to see how you were."

"Did you tell Gurd you were coming?"

"No."

"What's the matter with him?"

She lowered her head and drew patterns on the soft forest soil with her finger-point. Her hair glowed darkly in the morning's light, it deepened the color of her cheeks. "I don't know," she said in a reserved voice. She wouldn't look at him during these moments. "It is Herendeen's influence, I suppose." But her voice held no certainty, for she knew the answer and it was hard not to be honest with him. As long as she could remember, clear back to the beginning, she had never lied to him, never had failed to be candid. Yet, if it was difficult to evade his answer now, it was still more difficult to tell him the truth.

He said: "If a man is old enough to make up his own mind, he's old enough to know what he wants to do. I have

no business trying to interfere. I won't talk to him but I have done nothing to hurt him."

She lifted the soft earth in her hand and let it slide between her fingers. Her face was sweetly sober. Her long and fresh-colored lips expressively changed shape when she looked at him. "No explanations, no apologies. That is the way you've always been."

"What else can anybody do?"

"Nothing, I guess. Only it makes it hard for people to understand you sometimes. To know what is in your head."

"You never had trouble figuring me out," he reflected.

"Ah, but I have a special gift that way. I know you through and through." They were silently laughing at each other, influenced by an undercurrent which always buoyed them up when together. She turned, lying back on the ground, her body full-shaped against the folds of her riding habit. She was a long, round-contoured girl and even in this relaxed attitude there was a rhythm, a vitality about her. It affected him powerfully; it fanned up the close-held hungers that had been in him so many years. They were alike in many things, in the way of silence, in the heavy beat of feeling below this silence.

She pillowed her head with her hands and watched the bright blue patch of sky showing through the pine tops, speaking in a distant, dreaming voice: "Nothing ever changes, Clay. The earth, the wind or the sun. Or the things I want, or you want."

He remembered what Ann McGarrah had so swiftly asked him: What had he wanted? Now, not knowing what it was, he asked Catherine: "What do I want?"

She said in a faraway tone: "I wish I knew."

"What do you want?"

She turned her head, so close to him now that he saw the gray flakes of color in her eyes. The dance of laughter was in them, and an inexpressible gravity was in them, both humors blended. It was the way she hid herself from him when she chose. "Never ask a woman's age, never ask what she wants."

He said indolently: "I wish I had a steak, with onions. Maybe German fried potatoes and a piece of apple pie."



Now that's what I want."

She said: "Do you remember the night we rode to Freeport in the rain and ate Kern Case's flapjacks and coffee, and played rummy until he got scandalized at our conduct and sent us away? It was awfully dark in the Potholes."

"What ever happened to that brown dress?"

She said in a wondering tone, "You still remember it?" Then she added quite gently: "Somewhere in the attic, Clay. It is up there with all the other things I outgrew and put away to forget—and never quite forgot. Would you want to go back to those times, Clay?"

"No," he said, "I guess not."

She said: "There's something else I came up here to tell you. Herendeen has sent over the mountain for the Ryder boys. They're gunmen, Clay."

He said, "Time to go," and held out his hand. His fingers were warm and strong, they had a pressure as she pulled herself half-upright and for a moment, her shoulder softly touching his chest, she watched the dust dancing in a shaft of slanting sunlight, her eyes half-closed. "No," she murmured, "I guess I wouldn't either."

"What?"

"Go back to old times. We'd do the same things, and make the same mistakes. Nothing changes."

She turned her head to him, her lips pressed in soft humor. But the expression on Morgan's face sent the smile away and for this short heady interval of time they were remembering the same things, hard-touched by them, dangerously stirred by them. That old closeness came back, that old reckless, sweet wildness came back and shook them; and for a moment he was shocked alive by the things her nearness did to him. The past rushed up and he saw her as he had once seen her—a girl holding him away with a gay insolence even as her eyes pulled him on. He saw now the faint freckles at the base of her nose and the curve of her eyebrows and the close texture of her skin, gently browned by the sun—and the reflection of himself in her pupils.

She rose and stepped away from him and did something then that told him of her thoughts, she lifted her chin, her

face tightening against a flare of excitement, and pulled her hands behind her back as she had done in those old days when she was afraid of what was to come. "My boy," she said, breathlessness in her throat, "it is time to go."

"Back home?"

She shook her head. "I'm riding with you. There's something on Long Seven I want to find out. You don't mind, Clay?"

He had his awkward moment in mounting with his bad hand. They traveled single-file up the trail to Mogul's plateau, and afterward rode abreast across the dun-yellow surface of the high meadows, beneath a half warm sun. High on the tawny ribs of the Mogul ridge cattle grazed; a puff of dust rose from the bounding flight of an antelope, Catherine said: "It is a beautiful world, Clay."

He didn't answer, for this scene had brought forward a piece of his life he had relived many times. They had been young and headstrong and wild and completely absorbed in each other; yet in the space of a night he had married Lila and changed the course of his life. He could not look back now, from the distance of ten years, and unravel the puzzle of the youngster he had been, or recapture the strange complexity of his thoughts then, or the wind-wild swaying of his feelings. He could not place his finger upon the reasons for that sudden act; somehow it was rooted in a quarrel with Catherine, or in the dark and mysterious and exciting shadows of the night, or in the eyes and lips of Lila as she had looked up to him. It was a spark, suddenly struck, taking unexplainable fire.

There was no answer to the things a man did. That night he had left his first youth, with its careless and thoughtless love of life, behind; and he had left Catherine Grant behind; whatever his feelings for her had been, he had thrown them away. Since that time they had never spoken of it, nor had he ever seen in her eyes an emotion to tell him how she had felt.

This was the past that bound him, with its perpetual regret for having failed. It had been a mistake, as Lila had soon told him; yet though it was a mistake, he never ceased to think of how, by some greater effort or some clearer in-

sight into the heart of that girl whose temper was so swift to change from height to depth, he might have made her feel differently. His failure bound him fast; her memory bound him fast. Even in the worst moments of his recurring loneliness and restlessness, the old reproach of her eyes came to him to make him feel that his was the fault, for which he could make no payment except through faithfulness. It was an endless obligation.

Catherine said: "Clay, I'm afraid."

He broke clear of his thinking to see a worry on her face that had not been there before. She looked far ahead into the long yellow flush of the meadow floors, her mind troubled and distant.

"Of what, Catherine?"

She shook her head, only repeating, "I'm afraid." Turning the foot of the Mogul Mountains, they came upon the Long Seven yard. Janet was waiting in the doorway, her hands primly folded in front of her dress. Harry Jump and Cap Vermilye were near the corral talking to the nester from Salt Meadow, Fox Willing.

These three moved toward Morgan but he ignored them for this moment, caught by the scene of Catherine facing his daughter. Catherine walked forward, tall and pleasant in the sunlight, not smiling but near to a smile. Janet's small hands remained locked across her dress. Her face held its precise gravity, its unmoved reserve; her eyes were quite cool yet Morgan, who knew his daughter thoroughly—the shaded meaning in her various degrees of silence and politeness—recognized an odd restraint in his daughter at the moment. It was a mirrored resentment, the cause of which he understood at once. Somewhere along the last year or two his daughter had absorbed the viewpoint of Ann McGarrah. Somehow Ann McGarrah had mysteriously instilled in Janet her own dislike of Catherine. These were the ways by which women sent their feelings intuitively across space to other women. Janet was Ann's partisan and her small clear face, so exactly neutral, could not quite hide her jealousy. He stood by, quietly angered at Ann McGarrah for what she had done to Janet, knowing he had no way of changing Janet's expression. She was no longer a child to listen im-

plicitly to him. In her own mind, in that shadowland between childhood and wisdom, were beliefs she held by her own judgment.

All his life Clay Morgan had believed in self-decision. As he made his own judgments, as he had lived by them and taken the rewards or the penalties they had brought him, asking no help and caring little for outside advice, so he gave to others the same right. Every human being had to stand on his own feet and reach wisdom by his own errors and tears. Remembering this, he stood back.

Catherine was at the porch. She said: "I haven't seen you for a very long while, Janet."

Janet's voice was slow and cool. "Thank you. Would you like a cup of coffee?"

"No," said Catherine, and settled on the steps of the porch. She looked at her hands a moment, drawing a deep breath; she was sober and restrained. "No, but thanks. That's a pretty dress. I had one once, almost the same color. I wore it to a lot of dances."

"Were you my age then?" asked Janet.

"I was older. But at your age I used to dance by myself when nobody was watching."

"I do, too," said Janet. "How long did you have to wait before you could go to dances?" She spoke it and then, remembering her father's presence too late, threw him an embarrassed look.

Catherine noticed it. She said immediately: "It will seem long, as it did to me, but it really will be so short a time!"

Fox Willing moved around to face Morgan. He said, "Mr. Morgan, I rode over to tell you something. . . ."

Morgan watched Janet come over the porch to Catherine. She paused there, the polite disinterest gone from her small face. She moved her hands across her dress and suddenly sat in front of Catherine. "Tell me about the time you went to your first dance."

"It was with your father," said Catherine. "I was sixteen."

Morgan turned his back to them, astonished at the relief he felt. Willing said:

"I was down at the south edge of Government Valley last night. Coming up from a gulley I saw a man bunchin'

some of your beef. I got down and watched. It was a pretty bright night but this fellow was a mile away and I wasn't sure. Might have been one of your crew. So I waited till I saw him drive the beef over the ridge, headin' south. I figured to take a shot then, only it looked like he had some friends farther down toward the Potholes, so I didn't risk it." He seemed to be troubled about that, and quietly explained. "I've got a wife, you see."

Morgan said: "Thanks, Fox."

"Well," said Willing, "you gave us a break."

Harry Jump said: "We're wastin' time."

"Yes," said Morgan, "we'll have a look."

Morgan got back on his horse. He interrupted Catherine's talk. "Janet, we'll be gone awhile. But Mose and Pancho will be here."

Janet said, "All right." She turned her eyes back to Catherine whose face, for the moment, swung to Morgan, all soft and stirred. Something came across that space from her to him; he wasn't sure what it meant, but there it was, strong and warm. She said: "I'll stay here a while, Clay."

"All right."

Harry Jump said some impatient word under his breath, moving away with Fox Willing and Cap Vermilye. Morgan followed, and thus these four headed down the flats in the warm-brisk air of middle morning.

Breaking a lonely night's camp in the Cache Mountains, Parr Gentry entered Freeport quite early that morning. Smoke eddied up from the street, from still-hot piles of rubbish, from brush and blackened pines adjoining the town, there wasn't anything left except one log cabin at the head of the gulch. Parr Gentry sympathetically clucked his tongue at Kern Case.

"Mighty shameful thing to happen. For a fact. Hard on you, too, Kern. If there's anything I can do for you, just drop the word. Meanwhile, I been lookin' for a band of horses up thisaway. Seen anything of 'em?"

Taciturn from a sleepless night, Case said he hadn't, and walked away from Gentry. Gentry took the Burnt Ranch road out of Freeport, riding the up-and-down grades with his soft body loosely shaking, his toes pointed outward and

his moon-face tipped. His whole shape was idle and seemed without energy but his eyes showed a lively interest in the tracks on the road and presently, entirely governed by what he saw, he entered the Potholes.

He talked to his horse, he broke into tuneless pieces of song and now and then tried his luck at whistling. A dozen trails led from the main one. At each intersection Parr Gentry paused to read sign and always took the fresher tracks onward, so reaching deeper into the tangled maze of pines and gullies and brush-thickets. At intervals he passed the blackened mark of old fires; once got down from his horse to smell the dead coals of such a fire. Three or four miles into the Potholes, crossing a shallow creek, he saw a rider slide through the yonder trees, making little sound. Parr Gentry permitted his horse to drink. He dropped his head and his shoulders sagged down and he whistled without much attempt at melody—a thorough picture of disinterest, though his ears caught every soft footfall of the other man's retreating horse. Later, Parr Gentry found another trail and left the Potholes by a circling detour, reaching Herendeen's valley. The ranch quarters were a mile or more behind him and for a little while he paused indecisively in the road. While he seemed to debate a course in his head, his quick-rummaging glance saw a file of riders come down the slope of Mogul, through the scattered pines. This apparently determined his direction, for he turned northward on the road, heading for War Pass and eventually, twenty minutes later, was abreast the party as it reached the valley. From a distance he recognized Charley Hillhouse. By arranging the gait of his horse he met Hillhouse as the latter brought his men toward the river, apparently bound into the Cache Mountains.

There were four in the party, Hillhouse, two other Herendeen riders, and Gurd Grant. Parr Gentry's presence stopped the group. He removed his hat to dash the sweat from his egglike forehead and said: "Warm for a man of my bulk, ain't seen any horses, have you?" His glance touched them all, bland and meaningless, yet shrewd enough.

"Haven't seen a thing," said Hillhouse. "You seen anything?"

Parr Gentry murmured affably, "Just a couple of jackrabbits. What would old Parr Gentry, who's gettin' blinder every day, be seein' that you young fellers couldn't see? It is a compliment, Charley, fer you to figure I could make out anything at all. Yes sir, a compliment."

All this was spoken in a windy, wandering way. Gurd Grant said, somewhat restlessly, "Well, we're wasting time," and started on with the two extra riders. Hillhouse, studying Parr Gentry, delayed following the others until he had shaped up a cigarette. The rest of the party was fifty yards ahead of him and he had a lighted match against his cigarette when he spoke.

"What's up, Parr?"

"Wastin' your time around here, Charley," said Gentry. "He's in the Potholes by the little meadow on Frog Creek."

Charley Hillhouse said, "Thanks." He rubbed the match between his fingers, and dropped it. His glance followed that match downward; solemn and narrow-eyed, he stared at the ground. "Thanks," he said again, and cantered after the others.

From a viewpoint high on the side of the Cache Mountains, Vance Ketchell watched the land below with the eyes of a man whose own fortune was pretty much in balance; and this was how he happened to see Parr Gentry come along the Freeport road, disappear into the Potholes, and later emerge from them. At this elevation he had a complete sweep of the valley below, a sight of the south-running road halfway to Freeport, and a bird's-eye view of the small meadows in the Potholes.

All movement in so wide and lonely a stretch of country at once caught his glance, and though he did not immediately identify Parr Gentry he followed the man's erratic course. There were other riders abroad this morning, creeping slowly in and out of sight on the various trails looping below. He noticed Hillhouse's party come around Dell Lake, and was pretty certain of their purpose from the way they scouted the land as they moved. The Burnt Creek stage passed below his viewpoint and cut over the hills toward the Fanolango Desert. Somewhere in this vast land a gun's report rolled faintly out. Somebody seemed to be breaking

horses in the corral behind Herendeen's big house, with a lot of dust smoking up there. A rider, a woman on sidesaddle, came out of the Crowfoot country, traveling toward Dell Lake. This, he guessed, was Catherine Grant, and it amused him to notice how narrowly she missed riding into Hillhouse. All these shapes, made small and slow by the distance, seemed to weave a pattern around each other. Catherine Grant disappeared near Dell Lake; long later he saw her appear on the side of Mogul, now with a man.

This was when Parr Gentry came along the road below, near enough to be identified by the formless shape he made on his horse. More and more interested, Vance Ketchell saw Gentry meet the Hillhouse group and stop for a word; there was that last delayed conference between Hillhouse and Gentry, after which Hillhouse rejoined his party. This was what focused Vance Ketchell's attention. Hillhouse abruptly led his men away from the river and crossed the valley. Climbing the ridge, these men struck the Potholes not far from the place Gentry had left them and disappeared.

Catherine Grant and the man with her had reached the top of the Mogul rim. There was nothing much left to see, and no particular activity around Herendeen's, whereupon Vance Ketchell got on his horse, took the upward trail into timber and reached his own small ranch less than an hour later. The moment he came into his meadow he discovered visitors. Herendeen and Bones McGeen were dismounted by his door.

McGeen said irritably: "Where the hell you been?"

Trouble had crept behind Vance Ketchell. He saw it on the faces of both these men and heard it in the domineering voice of McGeen. Vance Ketchell had his shadowed moment of dismal certainty. Before another word had been spoken he knew he had lost his ranch. Riding before these two, he stepped from the saddle, a distinct chill threading his nerves. At that moment he knew what physical fear was. It came to him and held him still—and then because he knew he had already lost, he ceased to be afraid.

He said: "None of your business, Bones."

"No?" said McGeen, rising from the doorstep.

Herendeen shook his head, whereupon McGeen walked



to his horse. He propped his shoulder against the pony's side; he had a sudden grin on his face, the drawn, squinted, toothy grin of a man angrily amused. Herendeen, meanwhile, held his bright stare on Ketchell, showing Ketchell the fresh scars on his face, the stitched section of his lip. Now he said:—

"Morgan was up here last night, wasn't he?"

"Sure," answered Ketchell. "What of it?"

"You're through around here," said Herendeen.

Facing Herendeen, Vance Ketchell suddenly remembered that Bones McGeen was behind him and for a moment he thought he was a dead man; something in Herendeen's voice had been like a sharp signal to McGeen. And again, at this instant, Ketchell felt that frigid grip of fear. He was a smart young man and knew better than to make any sudden gestures, but he took a slow sidestep and a turn in order to see both these two. They had him flanked and they were watching him with the steadfast attention of men who had already disposed of him. Bones McGeen didn't move. He had been grinning; he was sober now, not thoroughly certain what Herendeen wanted. It was a little gap in the tightening run of time, and Vance Ketchell took advantage of it. He stepped on backward, using his voice to keep them interested. "What's Morgan got to do with me? I never heard a man had to have a pass from Three Pines to live in this country."

"You're through," said Herendeen again.

Vance Ketchell had meanwhile backed off a good twenty feet and now he saw them both before him clearly. They didn't have him flanked any more.

"All right boys," he told them, very calm about it, "just fly right at it. I know damned well I can beat one of you to the pull."

Bones McGeen drew away from the horse. He set his legs wide apart in the dust. A crease ran across his forehead and he stood with his chin lifted, staring at Herendeen as though something had gone wrong. He called to Herendeen: "You want me to go ahead?"

Herendeen studied Vance Ketchell over the stretching moments; he had the impulse in his mind—Ketchell saw that

pretty clearly.

McGeen rasped out: "I never saw the time I was afraid to bust into you, Vance. Say the word, Ben. Hell, he's only got two arms."

"Both good," said Ketchell pointedly.

Herendeen shook his head. "Shut up, Bones. Listen, Vance. You be out of here by morning."

Vance didn't answer. He watched Herendeen limp over to his horse and step up, making a second try before he hit the saddle. Bones McGeen didn't want to leave it like this; he was reckless and sure of himself and hated to see Herendeen back down. He called to Vance. "If it was me, I'd see that hole card, sonny. And God damn you, I'll see it yet, if you stick around."

Ketchell laughed at McGeen. "A couple of tinhorn pikers—that fits both of you jaspers. Come on—come on. I'm right here. Just have a try. McGeen, you're a yellow-bellied jackass workin' for a man with putty guts." He let that sink in, quietly turning wild. He wasn't laughing any more. He settled his boots in the dust of the yard and spoke again, naming off with biting precision the things he thought they were; it went like this, the list lengthening out until he could think of nothing else suitable. He lifted his right hand, knocking back the brim of his hat. Black hair fell across his forehead and sunlight glittered on the quick film of sweat creeping through his skin. He said as a parting shot, "You're pretty tough on old men and women and babies. If I'm in hell when you boys come along, you can bet your last dollar I'll put the blackball on both of you."

"Herendeen," said McGeen, in a begging voice, "just ride along for a minute."

Herendeen took his tongue-lashing with a smart, unmoved coolness. He spoke to Ketchell. "Be out of here by daylight," and turned his horse away, calling up the reluctant McGeen. "Come here, you damned fool." The two crossed the meadow, McGeen staring behind him with a dry, thin look of regret. Ketchell moved along the wall of his shanty to keep them in view. When they passed into timber he stepped back to shield his body, only his head showing. He saw McGeen wheel and lift his gun; a bullet

ripped the corner of the cabin, three feet above Ketchell's head, and another shot dropped Ketchell's horse. Ketchell had to step away from the cabin to clear his own gun for an answer. He threw a pair of bullets at McGeen and watched the latter fade back, compelled by Herendeen's yelling authority.

Ketchell squatted by the shelter of the wall, listening to their horses fade on the trail. He stared at his own pony, dead in the sunshine, and softly spoke to himself, "Kind of close, Vance, kind of close." His arms shook a little bit.

As soon as Charley Hillhouse entered the Potholes he halted the party to explain what was in his mind.

"Now we'll take up this trail quietly, for echoes run a long way through this timber and Hack has got mighty sharp ears. There's a couple places I used to camp with him and it is likely he'll be at one of them, if he's here at all. If any of you boys see him before I do, draw right down on him. Do not fire. Just draw down. I want to talk to him."

"Gurd Grant threw Charley a very odd glance. "You two were pretty close friends once."

"Close as they come, I guess," assented Charley.

Gurd said, "I don't get it at all."

Hillhouse shrugged his shoulders. Gravity pulled his face together; his expression was matter-of-fact, seeming to hold away imagination, and his coolness was something that never left him. As they went on single file, Gurd Grant thought about his own part in this affair with a growing unease. He had joined Hillhouse much in the cheerful spirit a man goes out on a hunting party; now, for the first time on this trip, he began to understand what they were hunting—and what might come when they found Hack. It gave him a distinct chill when he reasoned it out this way. It put a different light on the affair.

"Charley," he said, "I don't want any rough stuff."

Charley rode in front of him, not turning and not answering. Gurd Grant got the impression of a will in Hillhouse as hard as rock. More and more disturbed, he had his fervent wish that he were out of the whole thing. By disposition a sunny and agreeable man, he had never in his life lifted a gun at anybody; and though he had joined this group be-

cause of anger toward Morgan—an anger he still nursed—he could not, now that he thought of it seriously, see himself in the role of Hack Breathitt's captor. Squirming around in the saddle, he was on the edge of dropping out of the party, when Charley's voice drifted dryly back at him.

"You don't have to go on, Mr. Grant."

The tone of it affronted Gurd's pride. He said stiffly: "Just do your own thinking, Charley, and I'll do mine." An instant later he wished he hadn't said it. Gloomy and extremely troubled, he fell silent.

The Potholes was a section of land perhaps ten miles square, composed of gulches and ridges shapelessly twisted, as though in olden time an upthrust of the earth's lower levels had lifted and dropped this crust. The trails here, made by wild cattle and antelope and men secretly riding their own ways, circled depressions, sank into ravines, followed these ravines, and went slantwise up stiff grades, to fall again into other pockets. Over everything was the shade created by a dense stand of jack pine whose dry needles fell in a dry shower when they brushed the half-dead branches.

Grant didn't know the region well enough to orient himself, but Charley Hillhouse was thoroughly at home, selecting the trails without pause as he came to them. Crossing a creek that rose in the Potholes and died in them, they reached a meadow and carefully skirted its edge. Beyond this meadow the land again broke up. Charley Hillhouse lifted a hand over his head, signaling caution; a mile forward, coming to the lip of a deep glen, he waved his arm by way of command. Grant stopped, watching Hillhouse step from his horse and go forward, drop into the glen and climb the far side of it on his hands and knees. He had drawn his gun; near the top of the opposite ridge he flattened a moment, removed his hat, and thrust his head forward. In a moment he beckoned them to come up.

Grant dismounted and led the other men down the trail to the bottom of the glen. He climbed the far side slowly, abreast Hillhouse. Hillhouse pointed ahead.

Yonder, in a cup-shaped depression as large as a small

corral, stood Hack Breathitt's horse. There was a dead fire in the middle of the depression, and Hack's saddle gear. Hack lay beside a log, sound asleep, with his hat pulled over his head. From this distance Gurd Grant heard Breathitt's even, healthy snore.

## 12 HACK BREATHITT

Grant dropped at the right of Hillhouse, the two other riders crawled to the foreman's left and thus the four of them watched the loose-sprawled shape of Hack Breathitt. In this still moment Gurd Grant became fully aware of what he had committed himself to do and had his moment of bitter regret. Dreading what was next to happen he looked to Hillhouse.

The Three Pines foreman had let his gun and arm drop along the ground and on his face lay shadows darker than the dull light of the Potholes. Yet on that face was no particular sadness and no visible eagerness. All Gurd Grant saw was a gray, steadfast certainty. Then Hillhouse lifted the gun, sighted it on Breathitt and spoke quietly:—

"It's a hell of a time to be poundin' your ear, Hack. Wake up."

Soft as the call was, Hack Breathitt's awakening was instant. All in a motion he flung his blanket aside, sprang upright and wheeled around, reaching for his gun. Hillhouse's flat warning stopped Breathitt's draw.

"Cut that out. You're covered four ways."

This was a wrong guess on Charley Hillhouse's part, for only three of them had drawn on Breathitt. Gurd Grant, rising as the others rose, held his arms beside him, refusing to turn a gun on Breathitt and fervently wishing he were out of the whole business. Breathitt's black hair dropped down his forehead, a flash of wildness raced across his lank, whiskered cheeks and went away. He stared back with a narrow, gray-eyed interest. The mark of the wild bunch was on him, Gurd Grant thought. The chase had made him hard and thin-mouthed; it had put a look on him difficult to explain. Hack said calmly:

"You're a mighty stubborn brute when you start after something, Charley. I ought to've remembered that."

"I told you in War Pass, some time ago, I wasn't your friend if you touched Three Pines."

"Sure," murmured Breathitt. "Sure."

Hillhouse said to one of his riders, "Go get his gun, Riley. And saddle his horse."

Riley walked into the depression, circling Hack so that he would not be in the line of fire. He crept behind Breathitt, closely eying Breathitt's arms; he seized Breathitt's gun at one rapid reach and threw it toward Hillhouse, relief coming to his long face. He lifted the saddle blanket, folded it across Breathitt's horse, and tossed on the saddle.

Breathitt's horse grunted when Riley heaved up the latigo strap. A crow's strident squawking echoed through the timber. Shade pressed around them and even though the day was half-warm, Gurd Grant felt a growing chill in his stomach, along his nerves. He could not help asking his question.

"What are you going to do, Charley?"

Hillhouse ignored the question, whereupon Breathitt's grin showed very white against his steel-black stubble. "He's prayin' for an answer, Gurd. You don't know Charley like I do."

"No," said Hillhouse softly, "I got the answer."

Breathitt reached into his shirt pocket, producing cigarette material. He rolled a smoke, still showing that thin-lipped amusement. He lighted the cigarette and dragged in a deep breath of smoke. "You won't get far with a jury, son. You know that."

"Yes," said Hillhouse, "I know it. Riley, bring me his rope."

Riley released the rope from the thong of Breathitt's saddle. He came across the depression at a slow, bowlegged straddle and handed the rope to Hillhouse. Hillhouse hooked it over one arm, keeping his gun free; he looked upward at the trees a moment, then back to Breathitt. "Better get on your horse, Hack."

Gurd Grant saw it then. He stepped around in front of Hillhouse, shoving the gun aside. "No, by God, you don't work that while I'm in this outfit. If you want to take him in to War Pass, fine. But nothing else."

Hillhouse's eyes showed Gurd a hot flash of intolerance. He moved in, butted the point of his shoulder into Grant, sending the latter violently backward. He said, "Keep still. If you've got no guts you ought to've stayed home."

Grant cried: "Try anything and I'll throw down on you, Charley!"

Hillhouse spoke to Riley: "If he moves, bat him. Better get on the horse, Hack."

"No," said Hack, "I guess not."

"Listen," said Hillhouse in a jumpy, hard-pressed tone, "make it easy for a man. What you think I'm thinkin' about now, Hack? What you suppose I feel?"

It was entirely between these two. They faced each other, dismally sober, two tough men who knew each other thoroughly. Breathitt took his deep pulls on the cigarette, drawing the smoke into his lungs with a heavy-breathing relish. His cheeks showed pallor in this shade, his features were thinner, and the look in his eyes had the round, terrible depth of a gun's muzzle.

"Charley," he said, "there's a streak of Injun in you."

Hillhouse's answer held intensity, a dogged conviction. Yet it seemed to Grant that Hillhouse was anxiously trying to make Hack understand.

"I told you in War Pass how it had to be with me. I can't straddle the fence. God hates a man like that. Look at Ollie Jacks. Whut's different between you and Ollie? I'd hang any crook to a tree if I caught him. Whut other way can I handle you? If I see my chore, how can I turn back on it, even for a man I know well? You're a crook, Hack. That's what you turned out to be. And you wound up killin' a man. One of my men. I said I'd stick by Three Pines long as I worked for it—and I will. You see that, Hack? I got no option in the matter." His voice begged Hack Breathitt for an answer. "You see that?"

Breathitt showed his old partner an iron insolence, a black cutting wisdom. There was something in that look which none of them, long as they lived, could ever answer, or ever forget. Hack said: "There's a knot in your head and nothin' can change it. But put this in your book, kid. You've got a damned good memory, too—and this is something you

won't shake loose. It'll go to bed with you and it'll kill your sleep and it'll make your grub taste like sawdust and all the drinkin' in the world won't drown it. Take a good long look at your peace of mind, Charley. It's the last you'll see of it."

"Get on the horse," said Hillhouse.

Hack smoked his cigarette to the bitter end, tossed it into the dust. "Before the week's out you'll wish to God you were in my place. Never mind the horse, Charley."

Hillhouse pulled his feet together and dropped the rope. His chin came up and the gun slowly rose in his hand. He fired three times, shoving the gun toward his target as though he could not get it done quickly enough. Shocked windless, Gurd Grant saw the foreman's lips pull back at each shot, saw his face snap into grotesque and open-mouthed expressions of craziness such as he had never seen on any man's face before. The shot echoes pounded along the corridors of the pine forest. Hack bowed his head and bent his knees as if to kneel. Half-kneeling, he fell forward.

Hillhouse walked toward him, the gun sagging at full arm's length. He removed his hat and stood this way, staring down at the dead Breathitt. He said: "Well, he had the last word, like always." And then his lips framed silent words. The vitality left his face. When he looked around to the others he seemed faintly dazed. He said: "We'll take him back to the ranch and get a wagon and run him into War Pass. His family are all buried in the cemetery, which is where he should be. These Potholes ain't fit for any white man." Afterwards, he added in an aimless way: "I wish he'd seen the way I looked at it. I wish he had."

Gurd Grant swung around, physically sick, and slid down the ravine. He had to stop here long enough to lose his breakfast and catch his wind. Climbing out of the ravine, he reached his horse and turned it back on the trail. This was pretty much a wilderness to him but he was so absorbed by what he had seen that he let the horse have its own head, and so eventually he came out of the Potholes on Herendeen's range. Turning right, he threaded through the Haycreek Hills and reached his own place. He left the horse in front of the house. Going up the stairs he heard Catherine call from the kitchen. She came to the hall and saw his



dead-white face swing around.

"Gurd—what's the matter?"

"Nothing," he said. "Nothing."

"You're lying."

"Let me alone," he rasped out and went up the stairs. He locked the door of his room, slowly pacing back and forth from corner to corner. Catherine knocked on the door and called to him. He didn't answer.

Lige White, who loved hunting as he loved few things, returned to his ranch that day and turned a fat mule deer over to the cook. He had been gone from the house since two that morning, riding down some of the constant physical restlessness which seldom permitted him to remain long in one spot. He ate a late dinner in the kitchen and afterwards sat on the front porch to smoke a cigar, meanwhile listening to the soft step of his wife as she moved around the second floor of the house, engaged in those endless little occupations which seemed to fill her day.

It was a pleasant spot, this Running W ranch headquarters—a green oasis enclosed by a white picket fence. Poplars, sixty feet tall, shaded the house on all four sides and a creek, neatly confined by the rock walls, made an oxbow bend from front yard to rear, to irrigate the ranch gardens and the peach orchard. Adjoining this square sat the corrals and sheds and barns in their own orderly arrangement; atop the barn was a wrought-iron weathervane bearing the ranch's name—Running W. All this made a neat little island in the surrounding flats of Fanolango Desert, whose brown surface now shimmered under the late summer sun. Some miles away the rearing bulk of Mogul showed obscurely behind fall's haze.

Relaxed here with his cigar, Lige White had one of his rare moments of complete ease. Outwardly a straightforward man with extremely courteous manners and great personal charm, he had an inner complexity few people fathomed. This ranch, clean and groomed in a land where ramshackle conditions were customary, represented the feeling he had for some kind of method and some kind of beauty around him. He found deep satisfaction in watching its trimmed outline cut a mark against the encroaching desert;

he found peace in its shade and in the sweet dry odors drifting with the impalpable breeze. After his long hot rides abroad, after the sweat and dust of the day, it was pure solace to sit here, deep-sunk in the chair, and see the evidences of his own handiwork.

But if he enjoyed it, the enjoyment never lasted long. Sooner or later his surroundings ceased to be enough and he was left again with the tantalizing emptiness of his personal life. There were strong appetites in Lige White, a deep strain of robust emotion, a love of laughter and affections—and none of these things were ever completely consummated. Hearing his wife move around the house he reflected that it had been a good many years since she had come to the porch to watch him ride in. Somehow, early in their marriage, they had been repelled by basic differences—his strong wants against her fastidiousness—and so he lived in his world and she, aloof and serene, lived in hers.

He pitched the cigar across the porch and entered the house. She was on the second floor, moving around from room to room, but when he went up the stairs he found her seated in her own bedroom with a pile of darning on her lap. She had heard him come and this was her way of throwing up a guard against him.

He stood half-across the room, blackhaired and smiling, favorable enough in the eyes of most women, watching her face come up from the pretense of work. Her voice, cool as it was, never failed to stir him.

"Did you have good luck?"

"Nice fat one."

She said: "I'll have Chin smoke one of the quarters. You're quite fond of jerky."

"Meat's meat," he said and, jingling the silver change in his pocket, he idly circled the room. It was cool and orderly, as she was; it had her personality in it, a kind of gentle formality. She had dropped her eyes to the darning, bowing her head at him. Turned still, he found a good deal of pleasure in watching this woman who had been his wife for twenty years. She held her age. There wasn't a touch of gray in her black-shining hair, there wasn't a mark on her face. Something kept her young and something of girlhood

—faithful and unworldly—was still to be seen in her eyes. It always affected him.

He said: "Old girl, you're a hell of a good-looking woman, do you know?"

Her voice wouldn't let the silence remain. It hurried back to him. "The peaches should be picked. I think I'll turn Joe loose on them tomorrow. We'll can a lot of them, of course. But it would be nice if you loaded up a wagon of them and went around to the neighbors."

"What neighbors?" he said, shaking his head. "It is a poor word to describe what they are now, to each other. Herendeen and Morgan are ready to fight at the drop of a hat. Gurd's got it in for Morgan over something—I don't know what. We are going to have a fight and I hate to consider it."

She said: "You should know the reason for it, Lige."

"Why yes," he answered. "Herendeen wants to clean up the range and Morgan is a little shy on comin' in."

She said: "No, Lige. In the beginning it was over a woman, Lila. And now it is over another woman, Catherine."

He looked down at her, closely thinking it over. "Lila—maybe yes. But Catherine. I doubt that. He's closer to the McGarrah girl."

"There's one thing you don't know, Lige. Catherine was his first girl. Even before Lila. She still is. I don't know if he realizes that. I don't know if he understands why he is so bitter against Herendeen, or why Herendeen hates him so. It is Catherine, Lige."

He said: "You're damned pretty, sitting there."

She gathered up the darning and rose, turning to a corner of the room. "I ought to go down and see what Chin's cooking for dinner."

He came over the room. Hearing his quick steps she swung around, her face dark-set and stiff. Lige White showed her his quick smile, he showed her the gay, excited and unruly expression she knew so well. There was that insistence in him, that quick need. He put his hand on her shoulder, compelling her to come toward him. He said, voice giving him away, "Don't freeze me out, Grace."

She whirled back from him, retreating until she had

reached a wall. She put her shoulders to the wall and it was this picture that hurt Lige White, the sight of his wife shrinking away, actually in fear, with that darkness on her face and that adamant pride in her eyes, as though she hated the things in his mind then. It took all the drive out of him, it swung him around. At the door he turned, once more covering up his feelings, speaking as though none of this had happened.

"I'm going over to see Herendeen, and maybe Gurd. Probably be gone overnight."

She said: "Will you be going to town?"

"Yes," he said coolly, "I probably will."

They watched each other, their eyes steadily matched, silently exchanging something at this moment. She knew why he was going to town, and he knew she knew it.

"Grace," he said, "you never get excited about anything and I guess you can live without a lot of things other people need. I'm not that way."

She remained by the wall until he had left the room, listening to the crush of his feet on the stairs. Afterwards, posted at a corner of the window so that he wouldn't see her, she watched him ride out of the yard and settle the horse into a singlefooted dancing across the Fanolango Desert. As long as he was in sight she stood by the window. When the corrals and barns cut him from view she dropped the darning material from her hands and crossed to the bureau mirror. She placed her hands on the bureau top, watching the way her face remained set and dark. She said, "Why is it always like that?" and slowly turned from the room. Chin had left a broom and pan in the hall; she bent to pick up the pan and saw the uncollected dust along the floor. She went down to the kitchen and filled a pail with water and got a rag from a closet and lugged the pail up the stairs, kneeling on the hall.

She had forgotten about her dress, or she didn't care. She drenched the rag and slowly scrubbed the floor, not with very much method; she kept pushing the rag around and around the same spot, and her lips were tight-placed and tears showed in her eyes. She said, "This started long ago. Why do I always push him away? I always did. Now

he goes somewhere else. It is too late."

She moved along the hall, water staining her dress. Her hair loosened at the edges, coming across her forehead. Chin called, "Miss Lige White, what you do there?"

She cried, "Get back to the kitchen," and was openly crying.

## 13 ON THE TRAIL

Reaching Government Valley, Morgan located the trail of the rustled cattle a quarter-mile from the old agency buildings. The beef had been milled together and driven southward toward the Potholes.

Morgan was considerably puzzled at the openhandedness of it. "It is all branded stock," he said. "They can't keep it anywhere in this country without my finding it. So that doesn't make sense. There's but one way, which is to slaughter the stuff and bury the hides. But if they slaughtered, where'd they sell that much meat? Only other thing is to drive it completely out of the country."

"Well," said Harry Jump, "they could take it into the Potholes, kill it and walk away from it."

"I can't see a rustler driving off stock and killing it simply for fun."

"Skip the idea of rustlin' for a minute," suggested Jump. "Figure that somebody did it to hamstring you—make a poor man out of you in a hurry."

"You're talking about Herendeen now," said Morgan.

"As such."

"Well, we'll find out," said Morgan and led the group forward on the trail. A few hundred yards onward it occurred to him that Fox Willing was still with them. Harry Jump had thought about that also and now gave Willing a considering glance. "This ain't the way home for you," he suggested.

"I'll string along," said Fox Willing, "unless I ain't wanted."

"No use getting tangled in my troubles," Morgan told him. "Things are tough enough for you and your family."

"That's all right," returned Fox Willing with a trace of stubbornness. "You did me a favor. And maybe I'm lookin' at my hole card, too. If you lose out what happens to me? Herendeen would drive me off tomorrow if he could."

Harry Jump pointed to Willing's gun. "That thing in work-in' condition?"

Willing said, "It's been used before." He showed a flare of resentment in his gray-green eyes, he held Harry Jump's glance with a kind of surly pride. Jump, a rough-and-tumble man himself, seemed satisfied with what he saw and turned about in the saddle.

They rode along the flat country, with the Haycreek Hills to the right and the Potholes a matter of four or five miles to the south. The trail of the beef made a wiggling line in front of them, pointed for the Potholes.

Morgan said: "If they're driving the beef into that section it won't be far away."

But, half a mile farther on, Morgan saw that the beef wasn't intended for the Potholes. The trail cut to the right, going into the flank of the Haycreek Hills and aiming toward a low pass. More and more puzzled, Morgan followed. They had been in entirely open country; now as they rose with the slope of the hills they came to a gradually thickening stand of pines. Harry Jump pushed forward to ride with Morgan, dissatisfied and alert.

"Keep your eyes peeled, Clay."

They were on the main traveled stage road which, coming out of Herendeen's valley, cut through Haycreek Hills by the pass above them and continued on across the Fanolango Desert. The lack of caution in driving rustled beef on such a road increasingly puzzled Morgan, and the subsequent indirection also puzzled him. Halfway toward the pass the rustler—there was only one set of horse tracks—had pushed the beef off the road into a trail skirted by pines and high mounds of grass-covered slab rock. Morgan was in the lead, now and then hearing Harry Jump's repeated grumblings of caution. "Looks to me like this fellow changed his mind a couple of times."

At this point the Haycreek Hills touched one edge of the Potholes and the land here began to show the effects of the

geologic upheaval. The trail was narrow and circuitous and worked upward to the summit of the Haycreek Hills by labored turns. Through this extremely rough and lonely terrain the unknown rustler had put the beef, single file. Harry Jump said: "Hell, we must be right on top of it now. He couldn't make much of a drive through here in a night's time. Clay, let me get ahead and scout the land."

"Almost at the top," answered Morgan.

They were. The trail switched back and forth for the last mile or so, coming to a summit meadow densely surrounded by timber. A footless creek discharged its slow waters into a pond overgrown with swamp grass and lily pads; the frogs ceased to croak, all at once, when the party came by. The cattle had paused here for water, their tracks deep-dug in the marginal mud. Morgan observed this shadowed swampy meadow, its green stillness and its surrounding wall of darkling trees, with a strong interest. The smell of the rank water blended with the dry piny pungence of the hills and in the air as well was the odor of a thousand forest influences, sweet and wild and pervasive. He had, in times past, paused here briefly. Observing it now, a feeling and a desire were touched off in him—to make a camp here and watch moonlight lay its soft silver streaks on the water and see the heavy black shadows curl and settle and thicken in the timber, and wait for deer to come upon the swamp's margin, slim-legged and cautious, with their fragile heads sharp-poised a moment in the moonglow before they muzzled the water. This was a man's life; a part of its fullness—lying and listening to the loneliness of the hills break before the voices of the little night travelers, to hear the abrasive creaking of their feet and the sibilant movement of their bodies through grass; to see small eyes winklessly shining; to hear the "thunk" of a beaver's broad tail on the mud, and to see the V-shaped ripples on the still water where a mink swam silently, or a water ouzel cruised.

Long after he had passed into the timber, Morgan felt the pull of his desire, and laid it away in his head as something soon to do. There were only a few solid things in living<sup>t</sup> and this was one of them, if a man could stand the inevitable feeling which came with that dark and silent camping;

the feeling of lying hard against an earth which, born of some flaming collision, now whirled through space without destination and slowly grew cold—carrying with it a mankind too small to matter.

Breaking out of the summit timber, he saw a meadow lying steeply on the descending hillside, in which Herendeen's cattle grazed, and his own cattle. There was no doubt of it; at this short distance he was able to read his brand.

Harry Jump gave voice to his candid opinions. "Why, the brass-faced biscuit-biter! He don't even give a damn if we find 'em. See, Clay. It was Herendeen, like I said."

"Well," said Cap Vermilye, breaking a morning's silence, "let's see about this."

All of them knew what he meant. They were smart enough in the ways of trouble to look upon the trees surrounding this meadow with clear suspicion; the cattle had been too easy to find. Without saying anything at all, they worked away from this common spot, Morgan and Willing to the left, Vermilye and Harry Jump taking the opposite half-circle. Beating the edges of the timber quite carefully, Morgan and Willing reached the bottom of the meadow without noting anything out of the ordinary. Presently Vermilye and Harry Jump joined them. Nothing had been discovered, but they sat silently in their saddles, watching the grazing beef and not able to shake their grudging suspicions.

Morgan said finally, "Well, let's get at it," and rode out of the timber. He worked through the stock with Fox Willing while Jump and Vermilye took stations near the trees. After Morgan and Vermilye had collected all the Long Seven animals and had driven them back into the forest trail the other two riders came up, ready for the trip home. Morgan meanwhile had done some thinking.

"I'm going down to see Herendeen."

"Right with you," said Harry Jump at once.

"One's enough to lay this out pretty clear." Then he added dryly, "I think I can lay it out so he'll understand."

"You must feel pretty stout," commented Harry Jump.

"Both of us together might bring on a scrap. But he won't turn loose on one man."

"That's your opinion. It ain't mine."



"He wouldn't shame himself before his crew by settin' the dogs loose on me, alone. Drive the beef back. I'll be along."

This time he openly crossed the meadow and rode down-slope through the thinning timber, to come at last to the rim of Herendeen's valley. This was about five miles from the meadow and still another three miles short of the Three Pines houses; dropping down the shoulder of the hills, Morgan reached the road running beside Cache River and set off southward at a brisk clip, soon raising the ranch. From the intermediate distance he saw a pair of men on the porch and somebody working in the corrals. When he reached the yard both men on the porch had gone inside and another—Bones McGeen—had come out.

McGeen's face showed its shadowed surprise and its alert hostility. But he kept quiet until Morgan spoke.

"If Ben's in there, tell him to come out."

"He's here all right," grunted McGeen, and raised his voice: "Ben—hey Ben!"

A man walked forward through the house, heavy and deliberate. There were voices in the rear yard, softly talking and afterwards ceasing to talk. Morgan looked at the horses standing by the front yard and didn't recognize them; he was thinking about this when Herendeen arrived.

"Ben," Morgan said at once, "I followed a pretty broad trail out of Government Valley this afternoon. When I got to the end of it there was a jag of Long Seven cows feeding in one of your meadows. They didn't make the walk alone."

Herendeen's round, fresh-scarred face showed what seemed, to Morgan, something close to surprise; he threw McGeen a quick look but McGeen shook his head. Herendeen looked back to Morgan.

"I know nothing of it."

"Maybe you'd better get acquainted with your crew," suggested Morgan.

"I'll go up in a day or so and see about it. If you've got any beef there I'll send it back."

"I saved you the ride. The beef's on the way home now."

Herendeen said: "If there's any cutting to be done on my range I'll do it. Bones, take a crowd up there and stop that. We'll see what's going on."

Bones started around the corner of the house at once, to be halted by Morgan's down-slapping answer. "Hold on. I'm going to recite chapter and verse to you boys. The beef goes home and if you figure to stop it, you better figure to stop the boys with it."

"If necessary we'll do that, too," said Herendeen. "Bones, just bring the crowd around here a minute." He came on to the edge of the porch, his thick legs spreading and taking root. Bones moved only as far as the house's corner; he raised his arm and moved back toward the porch. Watching the corner, Morgan saw Chill Purdy and Jim Burden and Slim John show up. These were old Three Pines men. But there were four other men behind these three, unfamiliar to him. They stopped by the corner. McGeen, throwing a look at them, said in a voice that grated the words together, "Don't be bashful in front of the great Clay Morgan." It seemed to be a signal. Two of the strangers, both dark men with the same sharp, long-slanted noses, stepped out from the corner and moved on until Morgan, now watching Herendeen, lost them out of the corner of his eyes. They were somewhere at his left rear; throwing a glance that way he saw them halt fifty feet behind him.

Herendeen said: "Take a good look before you finish your speech, Clay."

"I see nothing new," answered Morgan. "You always liked a big crowd to stand behind."

McGeen said: "If it was me, Ben, I'd stop that talk."

Herendeen, so vast and heavy and big-boned, showed a thicker flush on his light-skinned face. He was a man without much quickness of tongue or mind. He lived on his feelings and on his strength; and with one exception his strength had always been enough. The exception was Morgan. He was affected by Morgan's cool answer but he brushed it aside with a quick down-jerk of his fist and went on.

"You hang around with crooks and you stick up for them. It will be a damned cold day when you move anything off my range, no matter what the brand reads. Take a look at these men. I have cleared out Freeport and I have shaken some of the nesters loose. That's just a beginning. I'm going to drive everything out of this country that don't agree with

me. That includes you. I didn't take your beef, but if it is on my land it will stay there until I get ready to move it off. The truth is, Clay, I propose to gut you down to your last calf. If you're on Mogul come spring I'll be mighty surprised."

Morgan said: "You always talked too much, Ben."

"That so?" cried Herendeen, his temper letting go. "McGeen, get on your horse and do what I said."

McGeen walked toward the line of horses. Reaching them, he turned back and his eyes swept the yard—to Morgan, to the two dark men behind Morgan, and to Herendeen. There was a heavy suggestion on his face for Herendeen to see, and Herendeen saw it—and stood bright-eyed and hulking, thinking about it. Morgan had this as a clear picture. Bones McGeen had put the thing in Herendeen's head by that single glance.

Morgan's answer was to swing his horse partly around to get some sight of the two behind him. He didn't know them, but he knew their kind—he read the signals of character in the trustless shadowing of their eyes, in the whipped thin length of their faces. They were men out of the brush, nerved-up and edgy, without scruples and thoroughly dangerous if given any kind of a chance. Herendeen remained still and these men waited and the pile-up of time got pretty bad; it was a weight on Morgan, an actual heaviness on him. He had his bad moment, his gray foresight of the trap he was in, he had his intuitive knowledge of how this might end; it hit him in the stomach and turned him cold and fear ran all through him, destructive and freezing; and afterwards, silently admitting that he had nothing left him but the gamble of facing it out, he put his hope aside, and as he did that, fear also left him. This, he thought in one small side-thought, was a queer thing: Fear and Hope were things that seemed to go together, and seemed to die together.

"All right," McGeen said, "what'll it be?"

Herendeen repeated, "Do what I tell you, Bones. Get on up there with the boys and head for the hills. Stop Morgan's crew."

Bones shook his head and one of the dark men at Morgan's rear spoke for the first time. "What the hell, Heren-

deen? You got what you want here. Whut you worryin' about?"

"That's all right," said Herendeen. "Do what I told you."

"Take care of this first," said Bones McGeen reluctantly.

Herendeen blew up. "God damn it, mind me!" He came off the porch in long strides, crossing toward McGeen. McGeen stood near his horse, his arms hanging down. A startled look showed on him and he backed up until his shoulders touched the horse. He said, "Listen, Ben, I don't take no talk like—"

Herendeen, a faster man than his bulk indicated, moved against McGeen. He hit him once, knuckles slashing McGeen's cheek terribly. McGeen, blinded and knocked thoughtless, hit the ground and made an automatic gesture toward his gun, whereupon Herendeen jammed a foot down on McGeen's arm, hard enough to make McGeen yell. Herendeen ripped the gun from McGeen's holster and stepped back; the whole thing had turned him white and half-crazy. He said, between long-pulled breaths, "Get up on that horse before I break your damned neck. You been talkin' back too much lately."

McGeen squirmed around the dirt and got to his feet. He rubbed a hand across the bruised side of his face; he started to open his mouth and cringed a little from the pain it caused. His nose began to drip blood; it struck his lips and rolled on down across his chin in bright, ragged streaks, dropping from chin to shirt-front. The dullness in his eyes showed how vitally that one blow had hurt him.

"Get on the horse," said Herendeen, "and do what I say."

McGeen turned and reached for the reins. He missed them and swept his hand out a second time, blindly. When he had them in his fingers he put his head against the side of the horse, stupidly still.

Herendeen said: "Go on or I'll bat you again."

McGeen made no attempt to throw the reins over the horse's head. He seized the horn, pulling himself into his seat. He stiffened his arms against the horn, bracing himself in this manner and closing his eyes. He said, "Damned world is going around," and fell out of the saddle suddenly; he hit on his face and belly, one arm doubled beneath him,

and did not move.

The two long-faced strangers came away from their spot behind Morgan and paused to stare at McGeen. Herendeen bent over and rolled McGeen on his back. McGeen's eyes were open but his muscles had no life in them. Herendeen nudged McGeen's body with his toe, saying, "Come out of it, Bones."

One of the strangers said in a disgusted voice: "That's no way to treat a man."

Herendeen motioned toward a pair of his own crew. They came up and seized McGeen, shoulders and feet, and lugged him over the porch into the house. The two strangers went on toward the corner of the house. They turned, no longer interested; something, Morgan saw, had happened here pretty definitely. Herendeen saw it too, and his talk jumped at them. "I'll do the talking around here. We're riding up the hill. I'll see about this beef business." He turned his attention to Morgan. "Get down from there."

"No," said Morgan, "I guess not."

Herendeen had his mind fixed; he drove his roused talk at Morgan. "Times change. I'm through foolin' with you."

Morgan said, "Let 'er flicker then, Ben."

Behind Morgan, suddenly, was the sound of an advancing rider. Everybody looked down the valley toward the newcomer except Herendeen, who was caught in the grip of his own slow, flat-footed will. He pointed a finger at Morgan and said:—

"You get down."

The rider came in behind Morgan, calling at once: "What's up here?"

It was Lige White's voice. Herendeen turned his head, reluctantly recognizing White. White came on until he was beside Morgan, reining in there with a certain deliberateness. His glance swept the yard and saw everything at once; and seeing it, he came to a rapid decision. This charming, easy-mannered man was deceptive. He could, when he chose, move fast.

"I'm on the way to War Pass. Better come along, Clay, if you're through here."

"I'm through," drawled Morgan, "if Ben is."

Lige White said briskly: "No objections, Ben?"

Herendeen showed a black and sullen and on-driving temper. "Lige," he called out, "you're interfering. What side you on?"

"On the side of my friends," said White. "You're my friend, and so is Morgan."

"Then you're no friend of mine."

White said coolly: "That's your business, naturally. I think I understand what's in the wind here and of course I could not stand by and see a shooting. The odds are a little strong. I'm surprised at you, Ben." He stared at the new men in the yard. He ducked his head at them. "News to me that you were short-handed on this ranch. When did you find it necessary to bring in the Ryder boys? I don't like that kind of business and I will not be a party to a general ruckus. If we've got to hire outside men, the situation is getting completely out of hand."

Herendeen listened to this frank talk with a flat-jawed unreason. He said: "If you're not with me, then you're against me, Lige. Don't come around here for help—and keep out of my business."

"Both very easy to do," retorted White. "I will give you the same advice. Ready, Clay?"

It was still close and risky, as they both knew. Morgan swapped a short glance with the smiling White, seeing a thorough understanding in the latter's eyes. Morgan made the decision for both of them at this moment, turning his horse squarely on Herendeen. The movement pulled White around and thus the two of them, holding their horses to a walk, passed down the yard in a silence that had no bottom. It was the longest stretch of time Morgan had ever known, for he realized that Herendeen, caught between desire and caution, swayed on dangerous edge. The man had changed. Some saving grace had gone out of him in the recent weeks, leaving him ungovernably set in his course, leaving him brutal and overbearing. He had always used his physical strength to get his way but until now some restraint of decency had held him in a fairly civilized pattern. That was gone; and so these moments while Morgan rode on down the yard were fatally heavy.

White rode with his head down, his eyes narrowly set; the knuckles of his rein hand were white from pressure. A hundred yards away Morgan murmured, "It's all right, Lige."

Lige White let a tremendous breath out of him, saying nothing until they had doubled the distance. "My God, Clay, what did you come here alone for?"

The river road bent around a point. Reaching this point, ready to turn it and shut the Three Pines ranch house from sight, Morgan had his backward glance. Herendeen and his men were in the saddle, heading for the Haycreek Hills. They were going after the beef, Morgan knew. He faced front again and set his horse into a canter, realizing he had a fast ride ahead.

Lige White came abreast. "Clay, I'm ashamed to say it, but I've strung along with Ben, not liking what's been going on around me. I still do not like it, but I cannot tolerate this kind of a war. Keep away from him. The man's gone crazy."

"A little late now," said Morgan. "There's a fight coming. Ben's made up his mind, and so have I. Stay out of it, Lige. And see if you can get Gurd to do the same." He stopped, pointing up the slope. "That's my way. Tell Gurd to stay out of it."

Lige White said with the greatest reluctance: "I have hated to see this day come."

"A long time coming," said Morgan, and put his horse to the slope.

Lige White watched him climb, excitement mirroring brightly in his eyes; afterwards he continued along the road, bound for Gurd Grant's.

Pete Borders, who had driven the Long Seven beef across the Haycreek Hills to Herendeen's range, lay on a peak of the ridge throughout the middle of the day. He saw Morgan arrive at the meadow—and grinned to himself at what was no doubt in Morgan's mind. It looked like an open steal on Herendeen's part, which was the way Borders wanted it to look. There was this sly and malicious forethought in Borders' head, this intent to bring on a fight that had been long brewing. Deep in his mind, behind this trickery, were purposes of his own—to help ruin Herendeen who, sooner or later, would betray him.

Later when he saw Morgan headed for Herendeen's alone, Pete Borders grew serious and a little restless. It was, he concluded, bad tactics on Morgan's part; and so, taking to his horse, he went along the Haycreek Hills until he was able to sight the Three Pines ranch from the heights. He made out the crowd in the yard and watched the parley; later he saw a new rider come along—which was Lige White—and saw two of them ride away. Morgan had got out of it with a whole skin, which relieved Borders immeasurably. From this same vantage point Borders later watched the Three Pines crew come into the hills. He was pretty certain then how it would be. Getting to his horse, he rode back into the timber, once more laughing to himself.

## 14 THE RUN OF HOURS

As soon as Morgan left Lige White, he turned his horse to the slope of the Haycreek Hills and presently, from a high point, he saw Herendeen leave the valley with his crew. Morgan calculated his margin of advantage to be about twenty minutes and entered the timber at a fast clip. He crossed the meadow wherein they had found the Long Seven beef and took to the dark trail beyond. The smell of dust still clung to the air from the passage of the cattle; it was in the middle of the afternoon, the sun half-down in the west sky, and when he came to the swampy clearing the shadows had begun to reach out over the water.

He caught up with his outfit a mile or two beyond the swamp. The cattle were single file, going very slowly on the crooked trail and stretched out for three or four hundred yards. Cap Vermilye was in front of them, beyond sight. Fox Willing held the rear, with Harry Jump still farther back to cover whatever might come up. Harry Jump was a little edgy with the strain of this thing; he showed relief at Morgan's presence.

"I been on the verge of ridin' back after you."

"They're half an hour behind me. We're apt to have a scrap."

"Hell with 'em," said Harry Jump at once. "Let's stop and have it out."



"Keep right on going. Fox, cut ahead and ride with Cap. If you hear any ruckus back here, join us. If you meet anything in front, let out a yell and we'll be right with you."

Fox, unable to crowd by the beef on so narrow a way, cut through the timber and rough slab rock with considerable difficulty. Harry Jump began to grumble at the lagging cattle, crowding them with his pony. Morgan dropped back a distance to watch the trail; there was no great danger of Herendeen boxing them on the flanks, the country being far too rough for that. Either Herendeen would follow directly, or sweep wide through the Potholes and meet them out on the flats.

They came at last to the stage road and turned into it. From the swamp meadow to this point had been more than an hour's drive and Herendeen was long overdue, leading Morgan to believe that Herendeen had circled them. The trouble, then, would come when they reached the open country. He joined Harry Jump, both of them hazing the stragglers forward until the beef was in a compact bunch. Vermilye and Willing were fifty yards forward; now and then a cow wandered toward the jack-pine forest surrounding them and had to be cut back. At five o'clock they reached the bottom of the stage road, left the pines and swung toward Government Valley, three miles distant.

Herendeen was nowhere to be seen, whereupon Harry Jump came to his suspecting conclusions. "He didn't want to try it in timber. He's waitin' for us to get in the middle of the flats. My idea is that he's watchin' us from the Potholes right now."

A similar thought had occurred to Vermilye. He trotted back to Morgan. "Now in case he comes a-bustin' out of the brush, Clay, we better just let this beef go and hit for them agency buildings."

"No," said Jump at once. "It's our beef, by God."

"That's right," said Morgan.

Vermilye joined Harry Jump, both of them urging the cattle along at a quicker gait. Morgan closely watched the back trail, not quite able to understand Herendeen's continued delay. The suspense worked on his nerves. Once, thinking he saw movement at the edge of the Potholes, he

turned and made a stand, searching the black margin of that country quite carefully. He had been mistaken, however, and presently turned to catch up with the beef. Near six o'clock, with the sun down beyond the Cache Mountains, they threw the beef on their own grass near the shattered dobe buildings of the old agency.

Morgan said: "Hold this jag in a bunch. We're not through yet. I want Herendeen to see what we took. Fox, if I were you I think I'd pull freight. Thanks for comin' along."

Willing said, idly: "Might as well stick around."

Cap Vermilye, always a forehanded man, got a few sage stems and a piece of old board from the nearest building to make up a fire. He had a frying pan and coffeepot in his saddle roll; and some bacon and a can of beans. He boiled up the coffee, fried the bacon and heated the beans in the frying pan's grease. Having no other utensils, they took turns at the frying pan, using their pocket knives, and drank the coffee straight from the pot. At seven o'clock, with shadows sweeping across Mogul's plateau, a single horseman appeared on the high edge of Mogul Mountain and quartered down. This was in the west, from which Morgan expected no trouble. Harry Jump walked deliberately to his horse and pulled out his Winchester. Morgan said, "Hold on, Harry." Rider and horse plodded unhurriedly through the blue swirl of dusk—a long stooped shape on a raw-boned animal; at a distance he waved his arm overhead and a little later Morgan recognized the nester Gale.

Gale came up but did not dismount until Morgan gave him the proper invitation. When the invitation came he dropped to the ground with an old man's stiffness; he poised both his hands over the muzzle of his ancient gun and looked out from beneath twisted awning-shaped eyebrows.

"There's some coffee left in the pot," said Morgan.

"Just whut I need," Gale answered. He slouched over the fire and tipped the pot against his mouth, drinking with an acute thirst. Coffee ran down the seams of his jaws. He said, "Ah," in great relish and sponged the liquid from the tips of his mustache with sidewise motions of his tongue.

Morgan said: "Don't mean to be unfriendly, but maybe you ought to move on."

Gale didn't smile. He was past the point of finding amusement in the world, but in his eyes was a light like the last glow of coals of a dying fire. "Don't you worry about me. If I didn't know whut I wanted to do, I wouldn't be here."

Morgan shrugged his shoulders. "Your funeral."

"It may be," agreed Gale composedly. "But if so, it will be a double one. At my age I'm too old to worry about dyin', for it is pretty close to me at any event, and I guess I'm poor enough not to fret about losin' anything. Most of my life I have spent tryin' to be agreeable to people, in order to make a livin'. A common man has to swallow a lot of dust and a lot of pride. It goes kinda hard at times. By and by he gets to thinkin' that maybe someday, before he shuffles off, his chance will come to take one shot at those high-and-mighty ones before which he has bowed and eaten his humble bread. You're a young man, Mr. Morgan, and you're free and you ain't ever had that happen to you. You ain't ever watched your wife or your kids cringe when a shot comes whinin' around the house. You ain't seen your wife look into an empty breadbox. That's a look it ain't good for any man to see. So you don't know whut it is like, or just how I might be feelin' about it now. I ain't in no hurry. I got a lot of time. That's all I ever had—just time."

He rummaged his pockets, producing pipe and tobacco. Morgan watched him fill the pipe and light it and settle on his heels, comfort coming to him as his lips chuffed on the pipestem. Faded and weatherbeaten and now silent, he was a picture of gristle-worn endurance, of infinite patience. His eyes still held that alive glow; they showed the one vital thing in him.

This was late September and suddenly, slightly beyond seven o'clock, the blue-running shadows turned to gunmetal gray and afterwards to full night. The haze of autumn lay over the land. Through this filtered a strong moonlight creating the effect of woolly clouds banked against the earth. Morgan led his horse to the remnant wall of the nearest dobe building and walked on until he stood alone, facing the open south. Fox Willing was in the saddle, circling the held bunch of beeves. The job was done and, as far as the cattle were concerned, there wasn't any need of staying

here. Yet Morgan knew that this waiting was necessary. Herendeen was somewhere in the yonder night. The big man had avoided a meeting in the timber, he had delayed his pursuit; but he was out there and he would come. Nothing changed much, Morgan realized. Herendeen had faced him for ten years, never giving ground, never able to forget. It was something that would not dim or die, it was a force that drove Herendeen. Thinking about that, Morgan admitted the same force drove him. Whatever the outward reasons, whatever the open quarrels and excuses, there was a deeper reason still—the native, chemical animosities of two men born to be opposite in all things, born to collide and to destroy. It was past explanation.

Stationed like this, apart from the group and facing southward, he heard Herendeen at last approach, hidden by the pulsing fog. Off there a steady rhythm rose, of horses moving at a slow run and presently slowing to a walk. Shadows appeared in the fog, and shapeless outlines. Fox Willing came in from the herd, dismounting and putting his horse near the dobe wall. He walked over to Morgan. Vermilye and Jump had risen and had taken position not far from the wall. Gale was out of sight.

Herendeen's party showed as a wide scatter of shadows on the desert. They were halted, two hundred feet away. Herendeen said:

"Morgan, I'm coming in to cut that bunch of stock and look it over for my brand."

Morgan said: "None of your cows in it, Ben."

"I'll see for myself."

Those shadows were too vague to be counted but Morgan knew Herendeen had at least eight men around him; and he also knew Herendeen's intention—which was to build up a fight on any grounds. He said: "Charley Hill-house there?"

"No. I'm coming in."

Morgan said: "Nothing here for you, Ben. Stay back."

Herendeen's voice boomed out. "You know the rules of the country. It's my privilege to cut any man's range for my stock. I claim there's Three Pines cows in that bunch."

"If there are," said Morgan coolly, "I'll send them back tomorrow."

"I want 'em now."

"You're in a hurry all of a sudden," pointed out Morgan ironically. "I sent word to you some time ago to clean your stuff out of this valley and you didn't seem to figure it worth your time. So you can wait another day. You won't cut this bunch tonight, or any time. Get off my grass."

"You goin' against the rules?"

"You been making the rules a long time, Ben. Now I'll make 'em."

Herendeen said: "I've listened to you long enough. We'll settle this now."

Morgan's reply was soft and flat in the night. "Let 'er flicker, Ben. When you move in we start shootin'."

He heard Herendeen say: "Come on, boys."

Lige White, considerably disturbed by his interview with Morgan and pretty much at sea in his own mind, traveled over the lower spur at the Haycreek Hills and came down on the Grant house at a fast clip, the sound of his arrival bringing Catherine to the door. He said: "There's hell to pay around here. Where's Gurd?"

"Upstairs. What's the trouble, Lige?"

White called: "Hey, Gurd, come down right now." He rolled himself a cigarette while he waited and made a sketchy explanation to Catherine, nervousness catching at his words. "I ran into Clay at Herendeen's. They were jawing over something and Herendeen had a bunch of tough hands around the place. Clay was there alone. It looked like trouble for a minute but I dragged Clay away." Gurd appeared in the doorway of the house, strained and attentive. "Clay," went on Lige White, "said he thought there'd be a fight. He went back to the hills."

Catherine said: "Whereabouts in the hills?"

"I don't know." Lige White considered these two people gravely. "I always led Ben to believe I'd string with him in any showdown over rustlers. And I guess I have given him reason to believe I approved his way of getting nesters out of the country. But I can't see him tie into Clay. Gurd, don't you give him any help. Stay out of it. That's what Clay told

me to say. I'd say it anyhow."

Catherine said at once: "If there's any help needed from Crowfoot Clay will get it, not Ben Herendeen."

Gurd Grant looked sick and desperate. He put his shoulder against the doorway. He said: "Lige, how did we get into this mess? I'd give a thousand dollars—"

Catherine turned on her brother. "What's bothering you, Gurd?"

Gurd dropped his eyes. His face, normally so light and cheerful, held a sallow unhealth. It was hard for him to talk and he pulled himself together with an effort. His hands shook; he noticed that and shoved them into his pockets. "I was over with Charley Hillhouse, on Breathitt's trail. We trailed Breathitt all morning and found him asleep in the Potholes. Of course I thought Charley meant to take him into town, to jail. What else would a man think? How was it possible for me to figure that Hillhouse, who had been Hack's friend for fifteen years, would—"

Catherine breathed out: "Gurd!"

"Sure," said Gurd Grant, sullen and full of self-hatred. "Hillhouse simply lifted his gun and killed Breathitt. I tried to stop it. It didn't do any good. Charley would have killed me if I'd gone any farther. What kind of a heart is in a man like Hillhouse? My God, how could he think of it?"

Lige White threw away his cigarette, finding the flavor gone out of it. He looked away from Gurd, suddenly unable to meet the expression in the other's eyes. Thus silent and indrawn, repulsed by the information and hardened indescribably by it, his liking for Gurd Grant slowly shriveled. Gurd Grant saw this withdrawal; he saw the change on Lige White's face very clearly, and he said in a quietly weary, terribly discouraged voice:

"What could I do, Lige?"

"Why nothing, I guess," said Lige briefly.

"No," answered Gurd, shaking his head, "you think I ought to have done something. That's what everybody will think. I guess that's what I think, too. God knows I won't ever forget it. But I don't know what I could have done." His voice trailed pointlessly away. "I don't know . . ."

Catherine said: "You never should have gone with Char-

ley Hillhouse. There was your mistake."

Lige White said: "What did you go for? I don't understand that. You had nothing against Hack. He was Morgan's best friend. You knew that. Why?"

Gurd shook his head, not answering. He stood with his face tipped down, the grisly memory of all this on his features. Catherine suddenly stepped over to her brother and put her arm around him. "I know why, Gurd. Let's try to forget it."

"Why?" insisted Lige.

But Catherine's eyes told Lige to be still. She was a tall and resolute girl, firm-shaped and attractive to look upon, and very loyal to her brother. She stood with her chin up and her shoulders squared, as though to resist anything that might hurt Gurd. Lige White, who had an eye for beauty wherever he saw it, silently admired her. She had a steadfast quality lacking in Gurd; she had a sober willfulness and an imagination that caught the color and melody of life around her. These qualities enriched Catherine Grant, they made her a full girl, placing a shadowing and a shining on her features, giving her a dreaming depth.

Lige said: "Stay out of what's coming. That's the best you can do for Clay now. We all got caught in Ben's net. I was a fool not to have known what he'd try to do. Now we wiggle out. I'm going to town."

Catherine watched him go. When he passed the far rim of the meadow she dropped her arm from Gurd and faced him. "This is hard enough on you, Gurd, without my making it worse. I'll never say anything more about it."

He said in a lackluster voice: "I don't admire myself right now, Catherine. It is hell for a man to find out he's a tin-horn sport. I always figured I could stand up when the show-down came. But I didn't."

Her tone was soft and cool. "You went after Hack because you wanted to hurt Clay. I know that. You thought Clay and I . . ."

He showed a reviving flash of anger: "The night Ben and Lige and I went up to Clay's place you were there. I walked to the end of the porch and saw your horse around the house. You were hiding inside. If you had nothing to be

ashamed of, why hide?"

She said: "Because I had gone up there to tell Clay what you and Lige and Herendeen had said that night. You were leaving Clay out of it, and I couldn't stand that. Ben had both of you convinced. But I didn't want Ben to know I was taking Clay the information."

Gurd said: "You can't blame me for thinking different. Ever since you have known Clay, there's been something between you. When you two are together I can see it in your eyes."

She murmured: "Am I that transparent?"

He stared at her as though all his suspicions had been confirmed. "Then," he said in dull reproach, "I'm right."

"I didn't mean that, Gurd. What I mean was that I didn't know I wore my feelings on my sleeve."

"You wouldn't show it," he pointed out, "if there wasn't something pretty strong between the two of you. I'm not the brightest man in the world but when Clay comes up I see you change. It's the way you look at him, it's the way your voice lifts. It is something the both of you know and don't have to talk about. Like . . ." He paused to think of it and added: "Like a man and wife looking at each other."

That brought color to her cheeks. She faced Gurd, her shoulders pulled up and with her chin lifted. They were exceptionally close for brother and sister and yet at times this girl had a way of retreating from him; at times her silence was a wall hiding her completely. He was proud of her in a way that she couldn't realize, proud of her beauty and her fine laughter and of her freedom, and because of this he was inordinately jealous of her reputation. This explained Gurd Grant's anger now—this burning resentment toward a man who claimed more of her than any man had a right to claim. It was a bitter thing to stand here and know the kind of memories she had. Something in her expression made him drop his glance. Her voice was soft, it was long-remembering. "Whatever it may be, it is part of my life and part of Clay's. It belongs to nobody else. There is no day or hour or moment of the past I regret or am ashamed of. Remember, Gurd, I have known Clay many years." Then she added, quite gently, "I knew him before Lila did."



"And after he threw you over," pointed out Gurd, "you still stood around, waiting."

She said in a swift, sighing voice: "Not waiting, Gurd. Women don't wait for things they can't have. They're more practical than that. They take the best they can get and go on with it."

He said: "Which doesn't make sense, for you could have had a dozen men—and you could have Ben now."

"If I could have found any man I really liked I would have married him—to hurt Clay as much as he hurt me. You don't know how bad it was for me. You never will know. But . . ." She shrugged her shoulders. "There never was a man. Not one to fill Clay's place."

"Hurt him?" said Gurd, finding all this strange and unfathomable.

She gave him a small, wise smile. "Of course. He knows how much he hurt me. That is one of the things you see in his eyes, Gurd, when he looks at me. He knows. And he knows how much I could hurt him, even now."

"If it is that way between you," said Gurd unbelievably, "what keeps you apart?"

"More memories," said Catherine. Her lips came softly together and the old dreaming was in her eyes again, past his understanding. Gurd shook his head with impatience.

"You're contradictin' yourself, Sis. You're still waiting."

He had never seen her cry. Now, meeting her eyes, he thought he saw tears in them. For the briefest of moments her pride dropped and he noticed something in her that was warm and wild and shocking. He had never known that her laughter and her cool pride had covered this intensity of emotion or this whole-bodied surrender to desire. She was saying: "Gurd, don't be stupid! Don't pry into me."

"I'm sorry," he said. "I guess I've done something else wrong. God knows what I can do now."

She said: "If I knew where Clay was . . ."

Gurd, stung by his mistakes, still remembered he had given his word to Herendeen. It was the one thing to which he could cling. So he said: "We can't go against him. I'll do nothing, one way or the other."

She went on, as though not hearing him. "They have

quarreled too often. They'll meet." She stared at her brother, cold as ice. "If Clay should die, I think I'd kill Ben. Is it so horrible to say? Perhaps it is. But I can't help it. All that I know of Clay, all that we have been—all the things said and the things unsaid . . . There is too much of him in me. If he should die, what would be left of me? Not very much, Gurd."

She walked from the porch to her horse standing by. Gurd said, "Wait a minute—where you going?" She didn't answer. Swinging up a hand she left the yard, bound toward Mogul's rim.

## 15 THE SMALL, STILL VOICE

Charley Hillhouse brought up Breathitt's horse and lashed the dead man to the saddle and took him back to Three Pines. When he came to describe the affair to Herendeen the words seemed to stick in his dry throat. It puzzled him, that it should be so hard to make a simple story of it. Too, there was an odd look in Herendeen's eyes and something queer in his voice. Herendeen said slowly: "All right, Charley." Nothing more.

Hillhouse said: "I'm takin' him into War Pass. That's where his people are buried."

Herendeen gave Hillhouse a wondering stare and went into the house. Hillhouse hitched a team to the flatbed wagon, covered Breathitt with a tarp and drove to town. It was a long trip and he found himself returning constantly to one wish. In fact, along that journey, he spoke his wish aloud. "Wish you'd seen it my way, Hack. I couldn't do nothing else." This seemed important to him. He could have done nothing else. A crook was a crook. He had shot Ollie Jacks; how could he, being a just man, do differently with Breathitt? All the old times were as nothing against a man's righteous regard for his principles.

He found himself going into the past, remembering when Hack and he had gotten into difficulties at the Long Grade saloon. The two of them against the town. Hack, he recalled, stood against the street wall, covering the room while he, Charley, backed out; and both of them, out in the desert,

had stopped to laugh about it. Hack always found something funny in the day, he could always laugh. He had even smiled when he knew he was to be shot. Hillhouse stirred on the wagon seat; he rubbed the reins between his fingers and lowered his hat against the late-slanting sun.

He drove through War Pass. When he backed against the office door of Doctor Padden, who was also coroner, Jesse Rusey came by. Hillhouse said: "Give me a hand, Jesse," and the two of them carried Breathitt into Padden's office. Padden wasn't around but there was a side room with a long table in it; they left Breathitt here. Rusey said: "A little trouble?"

"Yeah."

Rusey said, "Too bad," and went out. The marshal's province was War Pass, not anything beyond; and he had seen too much death to show much curiosity about one more dead man. Hillhouse delayed his departure, both hands lying on the table beside Breathitt. Breathitt's face was gray and dirty, but it was still the face of a man who had looked on life as a game to be taken as lightly as possible. This was the thing which bothered Hillhouse most at the moment. Hack's eyes were open; they were light and clear and when Hillhouse bent forward they seemed to look straight at him, with the same ironic disbelief, as though he knew some secret about life Hillhouse didn't know. Hillhouse suddenly removed his own hat, placed it over Hack's face and turned from the room.

He drove the wagon as far as the Long Grade, here stopping for a drink. The barkeep made some casual remark about the weather which Hillhouse accepted in dour silence; thereafter the barkeep held his own council. Hillhouse paid for the drink, went out and climbed into the wagon. He held the reins in his hand, a foot poised on the brake. The afternoon was pretty much gone, with sunlight striking high on the east walls of the street. A stage rolled in from the desert. Jesse Rusey had his body tilted against the corner of the post office; his hat came down over his eyes and he seemed disinterested in everything, but Hillhouse knew Rusey watched him closely. It irritated Hillhouse, it got on his nerves. Ann McGarrah came from the general store, gave

him a smileless look, and walked on; two small boys passed him, kicking up the dust with their heels. Suddenly Hillhouse wrapped the reins around the brake-handle and re-entered the saloon. He said: "I'll take along a quart of rye," paid for it and returned to the wagon. Once more ready to go, he called to Rusey: "Morgan ought to know about this. He'd want to see Hack buried."

Rusey neither spoke nor nodded. Hillhouse, going out of town, thought to himself: "Somebody's going to make that man give a civil answer one of these days." Mrs. Benson stood on her porch at the end of the town road—buxom and attractive and looking out at the road with a certain sober loneliness. Hillhouse was a courteous man toward women, but he had his hard and fast distinctions as to quality, and looked at her and looked away, not lifting his hat.

There was no travel on the road. It wound with the foothills, it looped beside a creek, passed over a small divide and entered a scattered belt of timber. By the Dell Lake trail, he observed that three or four horsemen had recently come off Mogul; far up near Mogul's rim he caught the transitory motion of a rider. All these things he automatically noted, missing nothing of the signs or shapes or color of the land. Four miles from town he broke the neck of the bottle of rye over the brake-handle and took a long drink. At the foot of the gentle grade leading to Herendeen's valley he saw Lige White come out of Crowfoot way, and at once pulled in, awaiting the Running W owner's arrival. It was not particularly characteristic of Hillhouse to waste time on the road but there was in him now a need for talk. His own company wasn't very good, and so he had a feeling of actual relief when Lige White reached the main road and trotted forward.

Hillhouse said: "What's new?"

Lige White reined in, staring at him with a stiff-set expression. He didn't answer at the moment. Hillhouse had enough liquor in him to speak with a conscious distinctness. "No," he said, "I ain't drunk, Lige. Can't say I'm far from it, though. Been a funny day. Any news?"

"Charley," said Lige White, "don't ever come around my range, and don't ever try to make any talk with me."

Hillhouse held himself rigidly on the seat. "What," he asked in a singsong voice, "have I done to trouble you?"

"You're a dirty damned dog," said Lige White, his anger a precise and distant and biting thing. "There are things white men don't do. If I were Morgan I'd follow you all the way to hell. Don't ever cross my tracks." That was all. He went on at a brisk trot.

Charley Hillhouse stared ahead of him but saw nothing at the moment; his mind struggled with Lige White's talk. He scrubbed a palm across his face and covered his eyes a moment, and looked again at the fading day. At this hour, with the sun hidden by the Cache Mountains, the sharp edges of the land began to blur, and for a moment Charley thought his eyesight was going bad. He reached for the bottle, took another stout drink, and drove on.

A mile beyond this point Cache River cut nearer the road and a small grove of cottonwood lay hard by the stream. Charley turned through the grove and let his horses water at the margin of the river. He wrapped the reins around the brake-handle and got down, holding the whisky bottle. Slouched against the high wheel, he drank again and waited for the liquor to drop its hood over the things in his mind. But this surcease from thinking never came; drunk as he was, heavy as his body was and thick as his tongue felt, one small piece of his brain was a bright island of memory, holding its clear pictures of Hack Breathitt, of Hack's smile and Hack's eyes staring at him. He heard Hack saying again: "You won't sleep well any more, kid, and your grub will taste like sawdust. Remember that."

Charley Hillhouse spoke aloud: "I wish you'd seen it my way, Hack. I wish you had." He walked steadily forward until he faced a cottonwood. He drew his gun, holding it only a foot from the tree, and fired at it. Afterwards, stooping a little he studied the hole made by the bullet with a strange care. He held the bottle of rye in his left hand and now, knowing it would do him no good ever, he gave it a long overhand heave into the river. As long as he was alive, nothing would cover up his thinking.

He murmured: "Smart man, Hack. Smarter'n hell. How'd you know those things?"

A mile away, Lige White heard Charley's shot and stopped his horse. The road had turned a bend so that he could not see the valley; but he waited, listening for the shot's repetition, and while waiting he saw Vance Ketchell come down the slope of Cache Mountain and reach the river. Vance crossed over and came up, he said:

"Know where Morgan is?"

"Beyond Haycreek somewhere. Maybe near the Potholes. He was headed that way an hour or more ago."

Vance Ketchell said: "Lige, I'm kickin' over the bucket. I better tell you that—in case you're stringin' along with Ben Herendeen." That was all. Turning, he shot into the pines toward Dell Lake, and toward the rim of Mogul. Lige White pushed back the brim of his hat, scratching the edges of his jet hair. His expressive and handsome face was quite serious, quite still. Suddenly he said, "Oh, dammit to hell! Vance—wait a minute, wait for me," and rushed after Ketchell.

Excitement whetted Morgan's nerves to a sharp edge as he stood there and heard Ben Herendeen say: "Come on, boys!" Their horses were moving slowly through a night whose thick fog haze smothered everything. All shapes were mealy and vague. The campfire showed a round dull spot of red on the earth near by. Moving to it quickly he stamped the embers beneath his feet—and then heard the rapid run of riders coming out of the west. A voice, long and imperative, sailed on—Vance Ketchell's voice: "Clay!"

Harry Jump called back at once, "Right by the dove houses."

Herendeen's outfit meanwhile drifted in and a man yelled, "Bust 'em up!" That whole group broke into a run. Jump bumped into Morgan. He murmured: "Don't move around in this soup, Clay, or we're lost." The beef, bunched between the buildings and Herendeen's oncoming party, drifted aside. Herendeen's group came nearer and nearer, and at this moment Gale's buffalo gun began to boom out its massive echoes. Harry Jump grumbled, "Ah"—and fired and moved away from Morgan.

A man yelled, "To hell with this!" Morgan, awaiting a more definite target, saw one rider swing wide and rush in. Suddenly all of Herendeen's men were wheeling around

the beef, running for the dobe building near by, as though to circle it. Vance Ketchell called again to announce himself: "It's me, Ketchell—and Lige White." They raced down on Morgan. He had to step aside, barely avoiding a collision. Vance was out of the saddle, beside him and grumbling, "Darned near too late!" Lige White, still mounted, turned away. He called: "Herendeen—cut this out!" One of Herendeen's riders plunged straight on and fired once at Lige White's high-placed shape. Morgan and Ketchell laid their shots on this man. They caught his horse and watched it sink, they saw the rider free himself and seem to flatten against the earth. Morgan ran forward, trying to keep that man's shadow within his vision as it drifted along the ground. A shot exploded in his face, but he had the man spotted then and hit him with his first bullet. A horse came by him, riderless and confused and he knew at once Lige White had been knocked down. He turned back to locate White. He said, "Lige—Lige," and felt lead wither by him. Herendeen had reached the dobe and was charging forward. Everybody seemed to be over there in a quick, wicked dog-fight. The shadows made everybody reckless, the shadows covered everything and Gale's heavy gun boomed at clocklike intervals, reminding Morgan, even at this hot moment, of the old nester's relentless patience.

Morgan, throwing himself into the confused heart of the fight, put Lige White out of his mind. All his men were close to the ground, whereas Herendeen's party, so headlong in attack, clung to their saddles and crisscrossed the area around the dobe buildings, circling and charging and vanishing. A horse rushed at him in these close quarters. Morgan backed against the dobe wall and watched the brute's shape blacken and grow tall against him. The horse, sensing the wall, whipped around and Morgan took a snap aim on the rider, who wheeled low, avoided the bullet meant for him, and slid around the dobe.

The rest of Herendeen's men had veered off. Harry Jump ran forward, calmly swearing at them. He said: "Come on and get a bellyful!" Gale's gun went *Whung!* Over by the second dobe, forty yards distant, Herendeen's voice spilled its anger on his own crowd. Morgan said in a soft voice:

"Stay here—don't follow." Jump and Vermilye were here. Fox Willing moved around the wall to join them. Gale still clung to his own isolated position, wherever it was, and Vance Ketchell was lost somewhere in the yonder dark.

Jump murmured: "They're going to try something."

Powder smell settled around Morgan. A small, definitely cold thread of wind hit his face and there was a telltale smearing of the shadows in the open area by the far building. They were running wide, Herendeen's men, and now they were on foot, firing as they moved away from the dobe. Jump said: "I'm goin' after those horses," and scurried forward.

Bullets squashed into the dobe wall beside Morgan, causing him to shift slowly. Vermilye and Fox Willing had faded again, but suddenly they were all answering Herendeen's fire and suddenly, too, Harry Jump had stepped into a hot little fight over by the Three Pines horses, colliding with one man left behind to hold them. Morgan raced that way immediately, hearing Herendeen's crew rush back to the horses. He was against the wall of the dobe when they came in, and for a minute he was caught in the middle of it, no man knowing who the other man was and no man daring to fire.

Horses plunged around him, knocking him backward; somebody's shoulder hit him and then he saw Herendeen's men rise out of the earth's massed darkness, into their saddles. For a moment he had these targets to fire upon. A horse went down and a man cried with a strong, fearful voice: "Hey, wait—wait—" The rest of Three Pines had rushed out into the distant haze. Somebody groaned at Morgan's feet. Gale's buffalo gun boomed again and in the desert another gun began to speak up unexpectedly from an unknown source. Harry Jump stepped around the dobe, saying: "Who's that on the ground?"

The ruffle of Herendeen's horses diminished on the desert and, standing slack and tired in the open, Morgan knew this night's fight was done. He knew something else, as well. It was Herendeen's crew which had given way, not Herendeen. The big man's mind, once fixed, would never change. Harry Jump had gone over to the man on the



ground; he struck a match and killed it quickly. He murmured: "Who the hell is he, Clay?"

Vance Ketchell called: "Lige's been hit."

Morgan went over at once. Ketchell knelt on the ground, his knee propping Lige at the shoulders. Morgan said: "Whereabouts, Lige?"

"Damned if I know. Ain't my belly and it ain't my lungs. I'm just paralyzed from the hips down. What a hell of a turn. I never got unlimbered. I made a run for that fellow and he cut me down like a cornstalk."

Harry Jump called back from the near distance. "That was McGeen. But he won't cut nobody else down. He's right here, dead."

Morgan stood loose on his feet, more and more discouraged. Nothing was settled, and everything had to be settled. It went back ten years and it had come to this night—and now it would go on. He had his bad moment then, thinking of it; he had his savage wish that Herendeen would come back to try again. Afterwards he said: "Let's get Lige on a saddle. We'll go home."

Harry Jump returned, still puzzled. "Whut was that shootin' away out yonder? Gale?"

"No," said Gale, making his first appearance since the beginning of the fight. "I just climbed to the top of that wall and stayed there."

"Funny," commented Jump. There was little talk left in any of them, no feeling of triumph and not much of regret; this was the aftermath, dulling them. They lifted Lige White to his saddle and waited to find if he could hang on. He answered that by starting out under his own power, the others following.

Morgan drew back from the party, quietly calling Fox Willing. "Fox," he said, "I wish you'd ride over and bring Mrs. White to the ranch."

Fox cut away at once. The rest turned north, reaching Long Seven an hour later. Coming into the yard Morgan saw Catherine in the doorway. When he got down to help Lige White from the saddle he turned to look at her again, framed as she was in the light, tall and still and straight-shouldered; and he felt the tug of strange, old excitement.

Lige could use one leg only and had to brace himself between Ketchell and Morgan. Catherine stepped aside to let them pass, saying: "Put him on a bed, Clay," and followed the men upstairs into an extra bedroom.

The room was dark and they had a moment's trouble getting Lige on the bed. Morgan heard Lige grit his teeth together as they laid him down. Catherine found a lamp and lighted it and by this yellow glow all of them saw the whiteness of Lige's face. His hair came down on his forehead and sweat oiled his skin; his lips crawled back, forming a smile. "I sure as hell broke something. You know, Clay, if it wasn't too much trouble, I wish you'd send for Grace."

"Already have. I'm going into town for Padden. Vance, you better get his clothes off."

Lige White said: "I guess you don't know the whole story yet, Clay. Hillhouse cornered Hack and killed him. The man's a fanatic. I'm warning you about that, if you should see him in town."

Morgan's eyes dropped. He stood like this, quiet and cold and too weary to feel the full shock of the news. He said, after a while, "I'll meet him, sooner or later," and left the room.

Catherine followed him, closing the door behind. They stood on the landing, the girl's glance holding him there. He said: "We met Herendeen and his crowd down by Government Valley. It was after dark, or I guess things might have been different."

She knew what lay in his mind, she knew his temper and his desires. She said: "Where is Ben now?"

"On the road home, I suppose."

She said: "I didn't think he'd run. But I hope he has."

"You know he won't."

"I suppose he won't."

He said: "Janet asleep?"

"Yes." Then she added, as though it might mean something to him, "She asked me to fix her hair, Clay."

He turned to Janet's room. When he came beside the bed and looked down through the shadows he found she wasn't asleep. She reached for his hand, saying: "Who's hurt, Daddy?"

He sat on the edge of the bed, affected by the strange blend of little-girl simplicity and worldly wisdom in his daughter. She had a poise and a simplicity which frequently astonished him. Faced with it now, he knew there was no wisdom in softening the truth.

"We had a fight with Herendeen's ranch, Janey. Lige White was hurt. I'm going after a doctor."

"Was anybody else hurt?"

He said: "Yes, Janey—but not our men."

She murmured: "It is too bad. But I'm glad it isn't you." The pressure of her hand was warm and confident. She was pleased to have him sit here and talk with her; it made her expand and grow confidential. "I wish I had been here, Daddy, when you were young and danced with Catherine. I bet you were the best dancer of all. She is pretty."

"Wait till you get old enough to dance, I'll stand by and remember when you were so small you walked under the table."

She was silent, seeing the picture of herself dancing—and pleased by it; her lips softened and there was a glow in her eyes. Afterwards, in a faintly reserved tone, she said: "She isn't like I thought she was, Daddy."

"What did you think?"

"She likes me, Daddy. I didn't think she would."

He was, he realized, on the trail of something, and he knew he had to be careful. "Whatever gave you that idea, Janey?"

In the following silence he at once sensed the fact that she was struggling with her loyalty to Ann McGarrah. It was Ann who had somehow put that antagonism toward Catherine in Janet's head. He did not know why, but he recognized the fact, and waited for Janet's answer. Thin and invisible thread though loyalty was, it had the strength of steel; but somehow another invisible thing, which was Catherine's soft, sweet personality, had broken that antagonism, leaving Janet shy and unsure. She said: "I don't know, Daddy. Do you like her a lot? As much as you like Ann?"

He said: "Maybe I do, Janey. I'm going to town now. Better sleep."

Rising from the bed he heard her long sigh. "Will she stay

here tonight?"

"I don't know. Maybe, if you want her to."

"I wish she would. I wish she'd come and fix my blankets again, Daddy. It makes me feel nice. She's going to give me one of her old dolls. I'm not too old for dolls at all. She kissed me—you don't care if she does, do you?"

"No," he said, "I don't mind at all."

She turned in the bed, her small body curled beneath the blankets and her head sinking into the pillow. She murmured: "It is like having a mother. It really is."

He went out of her room. There was a difference in women nobody could explain, an understanding, or a touch, or some mysterious fragrance of personality some had and some did not have. Catherine had roused a warm dreaming in Janet, pleasing and comforting her; she had revived in Janet childhood's abiding faith.

Fox Willing was in the room with Lige White; the rest of the crew had left the house. Catherine waited for him downstairs. He was thinking of Janet at the moment, more deeply moved by her day's happiness than he realized. It showed on his face, for Catherine to see. He stopped before her and once again these two were caught by the strong undercurrent of things long ago said and done. They had a way of covering up, by smiling, by showing sudden streaks of gaiety. She said: "My boy, you are nothing to quicken the beat of a woman's heart at this moment. You need a shave, and apparently something to eat, and no doubt some sleep. You always get cranky when you're hungry."

"Janey wants you to stay on tonight."

She moved around the table. She put this distance between them deliberately, no longer smiling. "I can't do that, Clay. Not now."

He said: "I keep forgetting it wouldn't look right to you. Well, I don't know what you've done to Janet, but you did it."

She said with some concern: "You don't mind, Clay? I wanted her to like me—and that's why I came. At first something in her eyes scared me. Just for a moment I seemed to see Lila looking at me and I almost turned back, to go home. It is all right now. We're friends and I'm quite happy about it. It was something I had to do, and have wanted to do a

long time. It's been that important, to me, for my own reasons. Let it go like that."

He said, still in wonder: "How did you do it?"

Her eyes showed him a warm, deep shining. "She's still a girl, Clay, wanting to believe little-girl things and live in the land of make-believe. She knows those things aren't so, but she wants the comfort of them a little while longer. And I talked to her as though those things were good things, I told her I had been that way—and that there were times when I was still that way. She's been trying to grow up too fast, and I think I made her world a little more simple."

"Wait until I get back from town and I'll ride home with you."

"I'm not afraid of the ride, Clay." But she closed her lips, color rising on her cheeks. She came around the table, giving him a straight and swift glance; reading the tell-tale signs of this man she knew so well—the tightness at the edges of his mouth, the way his eyes showed darkness below the straight black line of his brows, the stirring of emotions below the surface. She knew his humors and his temper, she knew the things that moved through his heart and mind—and the one faithful memory that never left him and never permitted him to speak to her as he once had spoken. For an instant she had the illusion that somewhere along the hours the barrier had broken, but, closely studying him, she saw that it had not. She shrugged her shoulders as she turned away and her voice was indifferently colorless. "You don't need to."

"Hate to have you go alone."

"Then I'll wait."

Harry Jump joined him in the yard, but Morgan shook his head. "I won't be long, and you've got to watch this place. Keep everything close to the house. I do not know what Herendeen will do."

Jump had saddled a fresh horse for him; and now he lined out for town along a road smothered by a deep moon-shot fog whose thickness touched him and seemed to break as he went through it. The lights of War Pass didn't show until he had turned into the main street. He went at once to Doc Padden's house, hailing him out. "Lige White's in a bad way,

at my place. I'll go back with you."

Padden said, in rough regret, "Everything happens. Wait a minute." He went into the house for his hat and bag and walked down Custer Street with Morgan. "You heard the latest? Hillhouse killed Breathitt. He brought Breathitt into town and went out again."

They were near the stable when Morgan stopped. "In town?" he said. "Go ahead, Padden, I'll catch up with you."

Padden said: "Hillhouse bought a quart of whisky and started back to Three Pines. I guess it was on his soul, as God knows it should have been. Billy Wells came in a few minutes ago. He saw a team and wagon standing at the edge of Cache River near the Cottonwood ford, so he went over to look. Hillhouse sat against one of the trees. Guess he finished the bottle first. There was one bullet hole through the tree and another through his head. He killed himself."

Padden was a rough-handed man, made so by the kind of gunshot medicine he practised; but he had his moments of insight and now walked to the stable without looking around. Morgan stood in the street's dust until he saw Padden ride away, then he turned down the street, left his horse by the hotel, and entered Padden's office. A night lamp burned here, wick turned low. He screwed up the light and took it with him into the adjoining room.

The first thing he noticed was Charley's hat placed over Hack Breathitt's face, and when he saw it he knew at once the hell that had been in Charley Hillhouse's mind—his relentless zeal and his memories of olden times confusedly mixing and torturing him. This last small act of grace, the placing of the hat across Hack's eyes, told the whole story of Charley's suicide. The wild and bitter winds governing Charley had blown him at last out of life.

Living or dead, the essential things of a man seemed to remain on his face. It was so with Hack. The disbelieving, cheerful insolence was still present. Born restless and full of scornful courage, he had carried these qualities with him; wherever he was now, Morgan thought, he'd be showing hell or heaven the same half-gay and half-ironic expression. Maybe, Morgan added, it was the best way out. For during these latter days he had seen a faint disillusionment in

Hack, as though the youthful freshness and the strong appetites were wearing thin. Well, it was a new trail for Hack now; he could travel it with the same gusty pleasure that once had been his.

Morgan replaced the hat and returned the lamp to the other room. On the street he felt the brush of air on his cheek, and stood a moment in thought. These men had been close to him. Their passing left an empty place, reminding him that his wish to keep his youth alive was a futile wish. Suddenly, this part of the past was gone, leaving him high and dry, and presently other parts would go. It was a mistake to look behind, to try to hang on to what was over and done with. For him it was a strange thought and a powerful one; it pulled at his very roots and made him feel insecure.

He turned toward his horse. Jesse Rusey came from the shadows near the hotel. He said, "One moment, Clay . . ." But at the same time, looking across the street, Morgan found Ann McGarrah on the store's porch. Her eyes were on him and, silent as she was, he felt the pull of her will or of her wish, and so he walked toward her.

Rusey held his position by the hotel, watching Morgan and Ann McGarrah go into the store and close the door behind them. A light came through the window, reflected from the back room of the store; in a moment another door closed and this light died. Rusey rubbed a hand across his chin. Distant in him was a faint envy at Clay Morgan's opportunities, and a worldly man's curiosity. For Rusey's philosophy was a gray philosophy, wrung out of his cool, perpetual watchfulness. All people had wants. Some wants were little and some were big; some came cheap and some came high—but to all people sooner or later came a time when they placed their pride and all that they believed in against the one thing they most wanted, and made their decision. Usually they sold out. For in the world Jesse Rusey so closely watched, wants always came first. He knew what Ann McGarrah wanted. He knew her pride and her scorn of the ordinary follies and appetites. Now he stood, rubbing his chin, faintly amused that all these qualities had brought her nothing, and knowing she realized it; knowing too she

was close to her own decision. He had his curiosity and shrugged his shoulders and turned up the street. But he stopped again, still in the shadows.

At that moment Herendeen entered town with the Ryder brothers. Parr Gentry came from the stable and for a little while there was talk between these men. Later, Herendeen went up the hill to Doc Padden's house. A few minutes afterwards he returned to the group, shaking his head. Parr Gentry pointed down the street and all of them turned to stare at Clay Morgan's horse still standing by the hotel.

## 16 SOMETHING DIES, SOMETHING LIVES

Ann McGarrah followed Morgan into the store's living room. She came about and paused in front of him, quick to see the rough usage he had been through. Always, in action or in trouble, his eyes had a smoky coloring and this was present now.

"Sit down, Clay. If you're hungry, if you want anything—"

"No, not right now. I've got to get back to the ranch. I sent Padden ahead. Lige White's been shot. We had a brush with Ben in Government Valley."

"What—"

"We drove him back. But nothing's settled."

She said: "You know about Hack? Of course—you came from there."

He sank into the chair, his long legs pushed forward. She stood near him, looking down. She put her hands before her, locked together, and for a moment she had the expression of a little girl on her face, half-wistful and half-stormy. She said: "You shouldn't—you shouldn't. Suppose it had been you instead of Hack? And when you meet Herendeen, which one will it be? You are sure to meet. Everybody knows that. It is as certain and as brutal as death. Well, it is death. Clay, is there anything I can say to stop you?"

"No, not now, Ann."

"Not now, and not at any time," she added quietly. "I have never been able to change you. Never. In any way at all."

He said: "Why worry about it? You know me pretty well."



I know you pretty well. Let's be satisfied with that."

She walked away from him. At a corner of the room she turned, facing him over the distance. "What do you know about me? What do you really know?"

"I told you once, and you didn't like it."

"When you said it, Clay, you never meant it. It was a joke—and I hated you."

He shook his head, puzzled and gently amused at her. "There is fire enough in you to burn up the town. You swing like the weather—never still. You could be the kind of a woman, I think, to throw furniture at a man when you got mad. You could crucify him—if you loved him. And be sorry afterwards, I guess."

"Oh, Clay," she said, "not a scold—not a spitfire."

"No," he admitted. "Just Ann McGarrah who wants things perfect."

Her eyes grew darker and darker. "Clay," she said, near to a whisper, "you don't mean to be cruel, but you are. If—" She shrugged her shoulders, quickly changing the subject. "How's Janet?"

"All right. Catherine came up to see her today." He watched stillness come to her face, a listening intentness, a coolness holding away her dislike. Then he said: "They seem to get along mighty well."

She said: "Don't you want coffee?"

"Better get back and see how Lige is making out," he said, coming to his feet.

She walked toward him. She stood in front of him, quite near—this small, supple girl so intense and so crowded with willful pride. She was dark, she was vivid; her lips were red and firm across her oval face and he caught the fragrance of her hair and was affected by it. Looking up, she drew a long, long breath. He never was able to define the look he saw in her eyes that night—it was like fear or shame, or like a woman forcing herself over some obstacle she dreaded. Her voice was taut and very slow. "It is hard to learn some things, Clay. Hard to learn that sometimes nothing comes by waiting, or by praying. And very hard to find out that a woman has to change as she swore she could never change. All that I am is right here in front of you, but

it never has been enough—just to be in front of you. Is it something cold about me, or something of an old maid in me? I don't know. But only once did I ever see anything in your eyes that I put there. That was when I wore a dress which left my shoulders bare. I was a woman to you that night. Clay—I am not barren—not ice!"

She lifted her arms. They touched his shoulders and lay there, with the smallest pressure in them, pulling him. He saw her lips lengthen and part, he saw her eyes widen, as though she opened herself to him completely. Reaching forward he kissed her, catching the force of her sudden-giving body. But even then there was a difference, a strain, a lack. When he stepped back they both knew it. She caught her breath sharply, turning away. And said in a dulling voice: "No, not for me. Well, good-by."

He had nothing to say. Reaching for his hat he left the room, crossing the darkened store and letting himself out to the porch. Habit made him reach into his pockets for his cigarette paper; he rolled up a smoke without giving it any thought. He was like this, sorry and confused and still stirred by her kiss when he heard Jesse Rusey call out sharply:—"Heads up—heads up!"

That tone, from the silent Rusey, was a warning that made him drop his smoke and jerk around. He saw, first, the two Ryder brothers backed against the saloon wall, as though pushed against it; and then, his glance racing on, he found Rusey in the thick shadows by the hotel. Rusey had drawn his gun on the Ryders; he was holding them there. Morgan knew at once how it was, and backed against the store wall, sharply scanning all the roundabout shadows, his nerves quickening and his pulse striking hard in his neck. Swinging his head through a full half-circle he looked into the gray deserted shadows of Old Town and saw Herendeen slowly drop back around the corner of the blacksmith shop into darkness.

He remained in his tracks, knowing what lay before him yet puzzled that Herendeen should slide away as though avoiding him. He knew Herendeen thoroughly—the raw physical courage, the sullen will that drove him forward, the contempt he had for weakness, the hatred which for these

ten years had governed his life and his actions. Thus this backward step into darkness seemed out of character. Thinking about it, Morgan looked along the street again and now noticed the shape of somebody outlined in a dark second-story window of the hotel. He didn't know who it was but he realized Herendeen had noticed the man and was protecting himself in the fight to come.

For Herendeen knew the fight would come. This, Morgan thought, was the way it had to be; it was something long foreshadowed, long-awaited, and at last arrived. All his ambitions and all his dreams of the future came this far and perhaps ended here forever. He didn't know. The only clear thing was that he had to walk toward Herendeen and carry out the pattern so long established. As he stepped from the porch he had one great and final regret, which was that if this affair turned out wrong Janet would be left alone. The impact of the thought stopped him and he went down into his own private hell, caught between his pride and his love. It passed away in a moment, leaving him without alternative; this was how hard-caught he was in the pattern, this was its inevitability. Going on again, everything left his mind but the meeting which lay before him and he felt a compensating coldness flow through his body in quick successive waves. All images in the night were sharp, all smells were keen and fresh, all sounds seemed loud. At the corner of Ann McGarrahan's store he made a short half-turn and passed into the shadows. The main street was behind him with its lights. He saw Herendeen waiting at the back edges of the blacksmith shop.

Seventy-five feet separated them. Halted, he watched Herendeen stir from the corner of the blacksmith shop, take a step forward and halt again. The big man was a massive target even in the dark; he was wide and tall, and now still. He said nothing and Morgan said nothing. There was nothing to say. They had never talked much, they had only stood against each other, through the years, controlled by a dislike that came from something beyond their knowledge, and the years had deepened that animosity until this meeting was as natural as the drawing of breath. Waiting out the moments, waiting for a telltale motion from Herendeen, Mor-

gan remembered one thing which took away whatever scruples or compunctions he might have had; he remembered Herendeen standing in the yard, ten years back, smiling at Lila. This was all. The silence and the weight of the slow moments at last broke through the thick insulation of this big man's heavy nerves, and he took a sidewise step—which sent a small flash of wonder through Morgan—and drew his gun.

Morgan, hanging to his tracks, drew and fired. He saw Herendeen's gun kick up from its first shot; he saw the barrel steady again. The roar of the shots cracked along the street and somewhere men ran the walks recklessly. These were sensations that reached him all at once, these and the crash of a bullet into the wall behind him and the smell of powder. He had fired twice, still watching Herendeen's gun settle to a level pointing. But he fired no more, for he heard his shot strike home, releasing a quick small cough from Herendeen. The big man's gun dropped; he fired as it went down, the slug breaking up dust from the street. His shoulders fell back against the wall of the blacksmith shop and scrubbed along the boards. Morgan's bullet had knocked him back, and when he fell it was this way, slowly to a sitting position and then sidewise, as though wearily going to sleep. The shadows at the base of the building smothered him; all Morgan saw was the vague stain of his face.

The echoes of the firing had not yet died when men ran into the street, toward Morgan. Someone called: "Clay—that you?" He didn't answer, for he was paying his respects to Ben Herendeen—a man who had never known what fear was, a man who had waited for him, without trickery, to come up and end this quarrel. That, Morgan believed, had been the single great force in Ben Herendeen's life—his will to push aside, to destroy the one person who had ever taken from him anything he had wanted. He turned from the gathering crowd, walking back to the main street, fatigue beginning to spread through him. It was deep in his bones, it ran shallowly beneath his skin. Parr Gentry walked from the shadows of the hotel and confronted him. Parr said, in a smooth fatherly voice: "Well, Clay, I'm sure glad it wasn't you."

"Parr," said Morgan, "Vance Ketchell watched you go

into the Potholes yesterday and he watched you come out. You met Hillhouse and spoke to him. After that Hillhouse went into the Potholes, and found Hack." He had no feeling in his voice. The words were slow and flat. "If you are still in this country tomorrow night you'll be dead."

Parr Gentry brought a hand up across his mouth as though to sweep something away from him; his eyes at the moment were small and heavy-lidded, hiding whatever he felt. Then he murmured: "All right, Clay, all right," and turned back on the street.

Ann McGarrah was at the doorway of her store, watching Morgan. He paused in the dust, most of the energy and purpose out of him; it was the faint push of an old habit which swung him around, carried him through the Old Town to the cemetery, and took him to the foot of Lila's grave.

In this dark silence she was close to him, she was very real. Some things faded and some did not; her image was quite clear—that dark, dramatic face with the light of laughter veering so swiftly to the heavy shadows of despair and anger and tears. Childlike and womanlike by turns; hating herself and hating him for the mistake of a runaway marriage, and bearing it tragically while the short year went on, and dying with no love for him, no soft word.

The memory of this—the mistake and its consequences—had bound him fast. Through these years he had lived in the past, as though the past were alive, with always a lonely man's wish that someday he might stand here at the foot of her grave and see, in his mind, her face smile out an understanding. This was his fancy, his wish; somehow to have her understand that he had tried to make the mistake good.

But he remembered now a thought which had occurred to him earlier in the night. A man could not live forever in the past. One by one the links connecting him to it gave way. Hillhouse and Breathitt, who had ridden beside him through these earlier years, were dead. The sound of their voices was gone, their common memories were broken. Now Ben Herendeen was dead in the dust and at last, as he paused here in the wholly silver-shot fog, he felt adrift and free. There was nothing left of the old quarrel, the old fine times, the old adventures, the old songs. The last link of the

past had broken and he realized that he was, at twenty-nine, a man looking ahead because there was no other way to look.

It affected him powerfully; it spilled something into his blood, like a chemical absorbing the virus of an old fever. Looking down at Lila's headboard he said, to her and to himself in a gentle voice:—

"I guess that's all. What's gone is gone."

He crouched a moment in the night's unreal glow, one hand touching the headboard; and remembered her face then as he wanted to carry it in his memory—vivid and young and full of childlike pleasure—and rose and left the cemetery. He got to his horse, unmindful of the small crowd gathered at the mouth of the side street. Ann McGarrah still stood on the porch; she watched him pass by. Lifting his hat he said, "Good night, Ann," and heard her say: "Good-by."

He had been gone from the ranch nearly two hours. When he came into the living room he found Padden ready to leave. Padden said: "That wasn't as bad as it looked. Lige is all right. Mrs. Lige just came."

"Where's Catherine?"

"Started home about fifteen minutes ago."

Jump came in. "I got the boys riding circle on the place. Fox Willing's out on the flats, behind the rocks."

"You can pull them in. It's all over."

"What?"

"I met Ben in town," said Morgan, and left the room at once. Jump followed him to the porch, calling: "For God's sake, Morgan, tell a man . . ." Morgan curved around the yard and was lost in the fog.

Lige White's wife stood beside the bed, looking down at her husband. Padden closed the door definitely behind him as he left the room. Now she said: "You were on the way to town, weren't you, Lige? And then you changed your mind and started into a fight."

"Well," he said, "it was a way of passing the time."

"I know. Time's been heavy on your hands these last years. And your house has been empty, hasn't it?"

He could smile, weak as he was. He still had his old flash

of gallantry. "No house is empty with you in it, Grace."

"You're lying, Lige. I know why you were going to War Pass. I've known for a long time."

He laid a hand over his eyes. "I am not proud of that, Grace. God knows I hate dirt. But there are things . . ." He didn't go on with it; he had no way of explaining and so lay still.

She said: "This is the first time I ever saw you weak, the first time you have been helpless. Most always you have been so well, so full—and I've kept away from you. Sometimes you have frightened me, Lige. Sometimes you have made me feel ashamed. I have been a strange wife."

He said: "I saw a vase one time in a museum. It was a beautiful thing. The sort of a thing that gives a man a wallop to look at—to make him feel maybe there's a side of life he can't reach. I didn't touch it. Was afraid I'd break it if I did. That's you, Grace. I'm not complaining. I'm glad I've got as much of you as I do have." Then he said, slowly: "If I stray off the path, it is because a man like me belongs on the street, not in a museum. Looking at beautiful things ain't enough. I've got to have something to touch and use."

She showed the effect of his talk. It colored her cheeks; it put something close to tears in her eyes. She was a graceful, firm-bodied woman and even as he looked at her Lige White was stirred. She saw it. She saw the things it put in his face, and suddenly looked away. But a moment later she looked back, smiling. She pulled her shoulders expressively up, the color deepening on her face. "Always, Lige, you have come to me and always I've drawn back. That's our trouble, isn't it? Well, Lige . . ."

She made a gesture with her arms, as though pushing something away from her. She turned, dropping to the bed beside him. She lifted his head and slid her arm around his shoulders and, this close to him, showed him the long, straight glance of a wife who was desired, and desiring. "I've been afraid of too many things, I guess. Here I am, Lige, if it isn't too late."

Traveling westward on the trail to Dell Lake, which was also the trail to Crowfoot, Morgan came suddenly upon Catherine's horse standing riderless in the heavy-shining

fog. This was at the edge of the Mogul plateau, with the line of timber directly beyond. For a moment he had his deep fear of accident; then, coming up to the horse, he saw Catherine's shape against the trees. She had dismounted and sat now on the yellow-dry grass, looking toward him. He came before her, watching her face swing up. A moment later she rose, walking to him. She said nothing at the moment but her hand touched his arm and her face, pale and round in this light, showed its intent, drawn interest.

He said: "Why didn't you wait?"

"I thought that perhaps something held you in town."

"Yes," he said, "something did. I met Ben."

She came nearer, watching the familiar marks on his face, studying all the little signs she knew so well. So she knew what he had done, and said: "It's over then. That has been my prayer for so long—that it would be soon over. Go on back. There's nothing on this trail I'm afraid of."

He said: "Why do you suppose I came?"

She seemed to hold her breath. He saw her long lips tremble. Her shoulders straightened away from him. "Clay," she murmured, "say nothing you don't mean. I can't go through that again. To be as close as we were, and to lose it—I can't go through that again."

He said: "There is nothing between us now. Nothing except the things you remember against me, Catherine."

A long breathing sigh came from her. She was smiling, this tall and robust and gay girl; she was near him, her body still. She said: "Old times—new times. You have been a faithful man, Clay. I have never ceased to love you for it—even when there seemed nothing for me. Well, haven't I been faithful, too?"

She was there for him, she was waiting for him. When he put his arms around her and saw her head lift to him, swift and expectant, he felt the long rush of his youth again. When he kissed her it was as she had said: Something old, something new. Nothing had changed. The old wild sweetness was here, the same immense shock, the same feeling of a deep need satisfied. It passed between them and took the last loneliness, the incompleteness, the emptiness out of him. The ten years of waiting were finished; they were together.